NEW SHORT STORIES

argosy

H. E. Bates
Ray Bradbury
V. S. Pritchett
Arthur C. Clarke
Kem Bennett

MARCH 3/-
Price in Australia

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argosy

Vol. XXIV No. 3 MARCH 1963

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Acknowledgments are due for permission to reprint copyright material by the following authors: to The Bodley Head for the extract from "The Novels and Plays of Saki" and the excerpt from "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald; to Jonathan Cape for the extract from Anita Loos; to Constable for the extract from "Piece of Pie" from "Runyon On Broadway"; to J. M. Dent for lines from Ogden Nash's "The Party Next Door" from "Collected Verse 1929 On"; to Duckworth for the poem by Hilaire Belloc from "New Cautionary Tales"; to William Heinemann for "The Juryman" from "Caravan" by John Galsworthy; to Hutchinson for the extract from Anthony Glyn; to John Murray for the extract from Patrick Leigh Fermor; to Penguin Books for lines from Nansi Pugh's "The Cocktail Party" from "Yet More Comic and Curious Verse"; to Secker and Warburg for the extract from Malcolm Bradbury; to The Society of Authors and The Literary Trustees of Walter de la Mare for lines from "Selected Stories and Verses."

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Log Book

SOME weeks ago an advertisement caught our eye in one of those rather technical back pages of the newspaper that the normal reader tends to pass over; it was a small box in a corner and it said:

WORM WHEELS
BEVELS, HELICALS
and SPUR GEARS
Spurs up to 56 *in. dia.*
Bevels up to 36 *in. dia.*
Supplied complete or designed to meet customer's specifications.
Rapid service for own blanks.

This at first left us more than usually blank, except for a passing wonder as to what sort of steed it would be that needed spurs up to 56 inches in diameter—one of John Wyndham's greathorses, maybe?

The advertisement, with all its mystery, was then forgotten till about ten days later we succumbed to a bout of flu and a soaring temperature. At this point those strangely incomprehensible terms reappeared, not all together as a complete unit, but taking it in turns to fly in and out of our consciousness like teasing mosquitoes, each one ushered in by a sinister and inscrutable Japanese.

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"You like worm-wheel, mastah? She longest worm in Hoko-Suku. She long, long worm that has no turning, our worm-wheel keep the home-fires burning."

And he did a sort of hula-dance with an immense and gloomy rotating worm.

"Take it away," we moaned, reaching for the aspirin.

"You like bevel, mastah? Allee English like bevel for lolling under lug."

"Take it away!" We shut our eyes, but he was there just the same.

"You like our helical? Velly nice, velly sphelical. Can send message to Number Two Wifee by helical signal—yes?"

"*No!*"

"How about nicee spul geal, best in gealbox, finest spul flom Tokyo to Tottenham?" And he began to sing, to a tune from *The Mikado*,

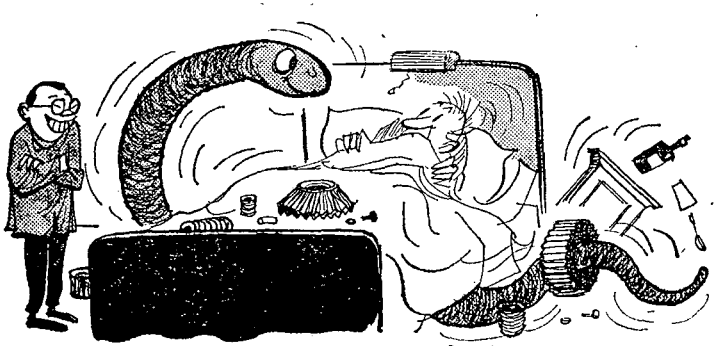
> "*Our spuls and our bevels*
> *Will blighten your levels*
> *And enlapture your fliends and lelations*
> *Supplied all complete, or designed to meet*
> *Customers' specifications.*"

Turning over weakly in bed we picked up the nearest thing to hand, a blank dummy copy of Argosy, and threw it at the incubus. It hit him and he bowed sorrowfully and glided backwards out of the window, remarking:

"You see extlemely lapid service, mastah! Allee blanks leturned in thlee days."

Recovered from the flu a couple of days later, we would have put the whole nightmare out of our mind, had not a rather battered copy of Algosy, sorry, Argosy, arrived this morning with a Tokyo postmark. We are still wondering whether to open it or not . . .

JOHN SILVER



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Gay New Story by

H. E. BATES

Captain Poop-Deck's PARADISE

IT WAS while walking home from an afternoon's dull and desultory pike-fishing that I met Captain Poop-Deck for the first and only time. My pet name for him fitted him well, I thought.

The day was one of those airless, humid ones in late August that seem to sap the energy of both man and fish alike and when even the leaves of poplars hardly turn in the air.

The weather, however, was having no such effect on Captain Poop-Deck, who was briskly and merrily rubbing down the old brown paint of a shabby fifty-foot cabin cruiser chocked up on a grey stretch of gravel under a thick wood of alder trees. Two young, smart, well-built girls were helping him, both with big pots of white paint, one of them actually hanging over the port side of the boat on a cradle, her large haunches bulging like magenta linen footballs. The other was a splendidly fleshy girl of twenty or so dressed in navy blue shorts and a very nautical blue-and-white striped shirt and a yachting cap from under which her dark hair hung down in a single pigtail over her left shoulder.

Captain Poop-Deck, who looked about sixty, was also wearing a yachting cap, well cocked to one side and it wouldn't have surprised me very much if he too had sported a pigtail. He looked altogether not unlike a very handsome pirate left over from a fancy dress ball. His frame was extraordinarily big-boned and muscular and was draped—dressed would be far too formal a word—in a thick scarlet flannel shirt, canary yellow trousers held up by a brass belt fastened with a snake buckle,

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and bright blue straw shoes. Round his neck he was wearing a stiff black-and-white scarf tied in such a way as to give more or less the effect of skull and crossbones, and as he rubbed at the paint he sang in sudden heaving crescendi of wordless song.

Seeing me passing with my rods and perhaps even guessing that I was nursing a certain luckless dejection, he cheerily waved a strip of sandpaper in my direction and called, "Hail there! Any luck, sir?"

His voice, for so large a man, was smooth and soft as oil. It was nicely cultivated too.

"No," I had to confess, "not a touch. Too warm, I suppose."

"After chub?"

"No," I told him, "pike."

"The chub are the boys here," he said. "Feller here last Sunday had a seven-pounder. And then, damme, about a quarter of an hour later, whipped out a twelve-pounder. Looked as big as a shark."

I stared Captain Poop-Deck very firmly in the eye. He didn't flinch a bit and the big transparent blue circles blandly placed between the sauciness of the yachting cap and the flamboyance of the skull and crossbones might have been the eyes of a trusting child.

"Come aboard, sir, and look the ship over," he suddenly said. "Come and have a noggin. We opened a keg at lunchtime."

I was tired; I was very thirsty; and I wanted to get home.

"The beer keeps ice-cold below decks or Lola'll mix us a planter's punch, won't you, Bosun?"

Lola was the girl with the magenta footballs; she was as blonde as thistledown and she turned and gave me a slow, flowery smile.

"The bosun mixes a beauty," Captain Poop-Deck said. "Heave yourself aboard, sir."

Half a minute later I was heaving myself up a rope-ladder that looked about as trustworthy as a string bag, and Poop-Deck was pulling me aboard with a warm and ebullient hand.

"Welcome aboard, sir. Splendid to know you. Meet my first mate," he said. "Tina." The girl with the pigtail gave me a quick, snappy smile. "Best Number One who ever sailed."

At that moment it crossed my mind that she was exactly the sort of girl men dream of being wrecked on desert islands with; at the same time I was unaware of how near the truth I was until suddenly I looked towards the stern end of the boat and saw there a quite remarkable flag.

It was of bright scarlet, with a brilliant canary yellow coconut

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palm worked across the middle. The colours so resembled those of the Captain's shirt and trousers that the flag might well have been made from bits of the same material left over.

"Ah, I see you're admiring our flag," the Captain said.

"It's very unusual. Why the palm tree?"

"It's the flag of our expedition."

"Expedition?"

"We sail for tropic waters as soon as we're shipshape. Didn't you read about it in the press a couple of weeks ago? Splendid write-up."

With the deftness of a lifelong conjurer, Poop-Deck whipped from his shirt pocket a long press-cutting in which a picture of himself dominated everything like that of an uncrowned king.

"Peruse that. Sit yourself down. The bosun'll be here any moment now with the grog."

I had hardly time to catch a glimpse of the words, *South Sea Adventure. Former Naval Officer Promises Other Eden*, before the Captain squatted down on the deck and said, "Brought me over a hundred replies in no time. People clamouring, fighting to join us. True, Number One? Without the word of a lie? Sit yourself down," he said again. "Sit yourself down."

With trepidation I sat on an empty beer-barrel. I had the sudden feeling that the deck of the boat was rather like an old ship's biscuit; at any moment it might crumble away.

"And still they come. Every day. How many today, Number One?"

"Nine."

"Nine more today, sir. And seven, I think, yesterday."

By now a few doubts had begun to enter my mind. Once again I stared Captain Poop-Deck straight in the eye and once again there was no hint of flinching. The blandness of his eyes even succeeded in making me feel slightly embarrassed at having had the presumption to doubt him, and I almost wished I hadn't started to say, "But this boat would never take a hundred people."

"Naturally not. Naturally not. But they can all participate equally as bond-holders in the scheme."

I didn't much care for the word "participate" or for "bond-holders" either, and I was glad to look up and see the bosun coming up from below decks with the grog: four handsome rum punches in long glasses each richly topped with nuts, mint-sprigs, and straws.

As I took my glass I started to say something about the drinks reminding me of Jamaica but the Captain cut me short with the friendliest enthusiasm.

"Ah, then you know the tropics, sir?"

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"Slightly. Where exactly are you bound for?"

The Captain looked secretive, in a way almost coy. By now the two girls were squatting on the deck too, looking rather like two worshipful handmaidens awaiting the pleasure of their master.

"Sealed orders," the Captain said. "Daren't say a word. Place would be swarming with tricksters in no time. No; all I can say is that I've had the great good fortune to come into possession of this island. And not being a selfish man I want to share it with others?"

"Desert island, of course?"

"Not precisely. Not precisely. There is habitation. There used to be a sugar factory but that's gone now. Bags of water. Wild donkeys—which we shall tame and use, of course—and plenty of bird-life, game, and so forth."

"And palms," the bosun said, taking the straw from her mouth, almost coyly too. "Don't forget the palms."

"Clever girl, the bosun. Always remembers the important things. Palms, of course, palms. The emblem of the expedition. As witness our flag."

"The palms are important, are they?" I said.

"Nothing more so. The coconut palm is man's best friend. Forget about the dog. It's the coconut palm. Where the coconut palm grows man can never starve. The meat and milk of the coconut will feed him. The tree will build his house and give him a roof for his head. How do you think the Polynesians survived on those long world voyages of theirs? On floating coconuts. Nuts drifting on the great South Pacific currents gave them their milk and meat. For months. For years."

"You've been there, of course?"

The Captain, after silently sipping at his straw for some moments, eyes down, at last looked up at me with an expression almost pained.

"Everyone asks that question. I wonder why. The fact that you've never been to a place doesn't mean it's not there. You've never been to the South Pole but it's there. Nobody has yet been to the moon but it's there. I haven't yet been to my island but it's there."

As the Captain expounded this beautiful piece of logic the bosun and the first mate sat looking at him with complete entrancement, almost rapture, and the bosom of Lola, the bigger girl, several times gave a great expanding heave.

After a silence in which I too sipped at my glass—the punch was really excellent, prepared with skill and care—I suddenly remembered the Captain's words about the scheme.

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"How does the scheme work?" I said.

"You mean you're thinking perhaps of participating? I don't know about that, I'm sure. We're pretty chock-a-block already. Almost embarrassing. The thing's gone like stink, I mean. Like wildfire. That's why we're working like blacks to get shipshape. Got to sail by October."

"Tell me about the scheme, anyway."

"Well, it worked like this," the Captain went on to say. "The island was roughly twenty-five miles long and ten wide. Two hundred and fifty square miles. Ample room for two hundred and fifty people and no treading on toes. For units of twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, one hundred, or two hundred pounds—two hundred was the statutory limit," he said, and I liked very much the word statutory—"a bond-holder would get a parcel of land, each parcel of land with shore frontage or access to it, of one acre, two acres, three acres, and so on.

"To be his or hers," the Captain said, "without strings, in perpetuity, for ever. It's as simple as that. Another punch?"

I was about to decline the offer of a second punch when suddenly I changed my mind.

"Splendid," the Captain said. "The bosun will get it. And one for me too."

I thought the bosun went below decks with a certain reluctance, a little unwilling to surrender her seat as handmaiden in the sun, and after she had gone I said, "Tell me, what about money?"

"On the island, you mean?" The Captain actually laughed, his voice quite honeyed. "My dear fellow, there will be no money. It isn't necessary. That's the marvellous, simple beauty of the scheme. Nothing to be bought, nothing to be sold—so why money? The palm, as I say, will house us. There's water everywhere. The place teems with grub. Yams, breadfruit, guavas, limes, sweet potatoes, game, fish, wild pig—good grief, my friend, we're fleeing from money, not seeking it."

"It's an ideal that man has always pursued, of course."

"Of course. Exactly. For centuries. For thousands of years. And what has stopped him? Greed, man, greed."

"Exactly. By the way, how would we get there?"

"Did you say 'we'?" The Captain's eyes shone not merely with ebullience now but with a benevolence of truly engaging charm. "You mean you want to be in? I had really made up my mind 'No,' but I rather like you. You talk sense. You're in."

"You still haven't told me how we get there."

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"As the advance party, in this, the boat."

The Captain rapped his knuckles hard on the deck and I almost seemed to hear it splinter. "The *Other Eden*. That's her name. The first mate thought of that, didn't you, Tina? Shakespeare."

The first mate gave the Captain a smile of pure enslavement, tossing her pigtail rather nervously, I thought, from one shoulder to another.

"As for those who come later, they travel either by air or sea to the Cook Islands, from which we shall run a weekly ferry service by the *Eden* to the island at a purely nominal charge. By the way, it takes quite a few days to get these bonds through. They have to be very carefully drawn up and vetted and then registered in London, of course."

"Of course. No hurry."

"Made up your mind which unit you might take up?"

"Not yet. I'll give it careful thought, though."

The Captain seemed pleased and said he would tell me something else I might have forgotten. This was no ordinary paradise. It was the perfect refuge from that evil thing, the Bomb.

"We might, in the event, be the only people left alive on earth."

"We might indeed."

"That's the part that really attracts people. They're all fed to the teeth with this mad, modern set-up. They loathe the ruddy bomb, the ruddy rat-race, the ruddy rush, the ruddy noise, the ruddy everything. They want peace. They want to get back to Mother Earth."

Thinking perhaps a little dreamily on the subject of Mother Earth, so poetically presented by the Captain, I suddenly thought of something else.

"How large a crew would the *Other Eden* need?"

"I'm hoping to sign on one more hand. Another good strong lass."

Here I suggested that an all-girl crew might, even in the very best of circumstances, find a voyage of some ten thousand miles a little beyond its powers, but Captain Poop-Deck laughed with a most refreshing and persuasive charm.

"Not a bit of it. These girls make damn fine crews. Prefer 'em to men any day. Got more stamina and don't drink so much. In any case we've got Skilly."

"Who's Skilly?"

"He's the galley-boy. Naval man to the core. Cooks like an angel and knows what's best, as naval chaps always do.

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Worth his weight in gold. Ah, here come the second round of punches."

I looked up in the expectation of seeing the blonde bosun. Instead, to my great surprise, there appeared at the top of the companion-way a pale, beer-soaked bag of bones in crumpled white shirt and ducks, a torn white pork-pie hat, and a slightly bloodstained apron. He looked something like a cross between a galley-slave who hadn't seen the light of day for six months and an old lag who had just done a longish stretch in a cellar somewhere. The hand carrying the tray of drinks quivered so much that the glasses tinkled and he stared at me with a trembling, beery eye.

"Ah, good man, Skilly. Got the drinks? Good."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"This gentleman here is probably going to join the expedition."

"Aye, aye, sir. Soon won't have room for 'em all, will we, sir?"

"We damn well won't. It'll probably have to come to a ballot in the end. By the way, what's for supper?"

At this moment I was in the act of picking up my second rum punch from the tray, but I could have sworn I saw in the Captain's eye the merest shadow of a wink and an even swifter reflection of it in Skilly's eye.

"Melon, cold salmon mayonnaise, baby new taters, green peas, salads, fresh pineapple and cream, four sorts of cheese and *Other Eden* coffee."

The Captain, after explaining that *Other Eden* coffee was a speciality laced with rum, said, "And I daresay a noggin of something too?"

"Aye, aye, sir. I got the 'ock on ice already."

"Splendid show. Good man. Lay another place for our friend here."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Here I was on the point of protesting that I must be on my way when the beery, trembling eyes of Skilly started trembling even more.

"Oh, I pretty near forgot, sir. While you was all having your kip after lunch, another young lady called."

"Good God, man, why didn't you come and wake me? Does she want to join?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Dead keen. Can't wait to get aboard. I told her to come back about seven."

"Good man, Skilly. Did she say who she was?"

"Lady Sarah somebody, sir, but I can't remember the other

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bit. She lives in that big house about a couple o' miles up the river."

Briefly, in silence, I recalled something of the beauties of Lady Sarah. Merely to see her ride past in jodhpurs was to re-create for yourself some of the excitements of Lady Godiva's ride. She sat on horses like a dark goddess. She rode tempestuous races at point-to-points. She was a seductress of other women's husbands. She had once got religion and run away with a rural dean. When she was bored, as she nearly always was, she amused herself by jumping on fresh band-wagons, such as those for nuclear disarmament, banning the bomb, or better deals for unmarried mothers. She was sensationally lovely, hopelessly irrepressible, maddeningly dominating, and so rich in her own right that she could have shod her hunters with gold.

"I know her," I said. "Her father's in whisky."

The eyes of the Captain positively flamed with vitriolic fire.

"Great guns. Whisky?" He crooked his arm smartly and looked at his watch. "Blow me down, it's a quarter to seven already. She'll be here any moment now."

"It rather looks," I said, "as if you might complete your crew."

"Eh? What? Oh! Yes."

Suddenly it seemed to me that the Captain had lost a very great deal of interest in my presence aboard.

"Well, we shall be seeing something of you, I expect. Sorry you can't stay." Without any other attempt at farewell the Captain turned smartly from me, giving sudden crisp orders. "Skilly, find the bosun. Number One, let's have this deck looking a bit more shipshape and less like a knacker's yard. At the double."

I finished my rum punch, climbed unaided down the rope-ladder and started to walk home. About thirty yards down the river bank I turned and looked back at the *Other Eden*. She looked, half-painted, more than a bit ghostly in the declining evening sun, but in imagination I worked on her a momentary transformation.

I seemed to see Lady Sarah, sensational and dominant, as her new figurehead.

A week later I walked back to the boat on a cool, showery afternoon on the chance of having another word with Poop-Deck.

Under the late cloudy August skies the leaves of the poplars above the river banks were full of fretful chatter and beneath them the *Other Eden* presented a sad and surprising sight.

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She was lying half submerged, slightly keeled over, in the middle of the river.

While I stared at this melancholy sight, still unable quite to realise that my chance of sharing Captain Poop-Deck's paradise had gone for ever, a dinghy appeared from behind the half-sunken stern. In it was Skilly.

He rowed ashore.

"Hullo there, Skilly. Salvaging the wreck?"

"Oh, it's you, sir." He picked up from the bottom of the dinghy a very tired-looking bundle of clothing wrapped in newspaper. He looked more than ever like an old lag starting out on a new life, though not very enthusiastically, after a long stretch. "Just saving a few duds. All I got in the world."

"What happened?"

Skilly, dropping the lid of one beery eye, answered with sublime simplicity.

"We was launching her, sir, and she just went down."

"Somebody pull the plug?"

"Not saying about that, sir."

"Not the bosun by any chance?"

"Not saying about that, sir."

I stared across at the wreck, thinking once again of my dream of her figurehead.

"Was Lady Sarah aboard at the time?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Very much so, sir. Her and the Captain got as thick as thieves in no time."

Musing briefly on the appropriateness of this expression, I asked if the Captain was about today.

"No, sir. Not about."

"Any idea where I could get in touch with him?"

"No, sir. No idea. Rather fancy he's gone on a little holiday with Lady Sarah somewhere."

"And the bosun?"

"Couldn't say about her, sir."

"And Number One?"

"Couldn't say about her either, sir."

After a short silence Skilly hitched up his drooping bag of bones and looked at me with eyes moist with infinite pleading. I looked back at him with a fairly solemn compassion.

"Haven't got the price of a pint, I suppose, sir?"

I gave him the price of a pint and he touched his cap and said, "Bless your 'eart, sir. Thanks a lot. May you always have jolly good 'ealth and jolly good luck, sir, and all that."

"And plenty of melon and salmon mayonnaise and all that."

"Aye, aye, sir."

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"And fresh pineapple and cream and guavas and breadfruit and the milk of the coconut."

"Aye, aye, sir. I know what you mean."

After that I didn't hear of Captain Poop-Deck again for about a year. Then an advertisement in a Sunday paper caught my eye. It invited you to become a bond-holder in *The Elysian Vineyards Trust. Own your own vines on the very slopes where the Romans grew theirs. Drink your own delicious vintage wine in your own home.*

The scheme, I discovered, was not only one of entrancing simplicity. It also bore the unmistakable imprint of Poop-Deck. You merely invested in units of twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred pounds and in return were allotted an appropriate area of vines. There was no work to do. The staff of trained viticulturalists on the Elysian Vineyards Trust did all the work. They bought, planted, pruned, and sprayed the vines. They picked, harvested, and pressed the grapes. They saw to the fermenting, bottling and dispatching of the wine. A unit of twenty-five pounds would provide you with a bottle of wine every day of the year, a unit of fifty pounds with two bottles per day per year, and all you had to do was stay at home and drink them.

And not only did you sup as the Romans did, on the wines of the Elysian fields. The vines, and the good earth on which they grew were yours, without strings, in perpetuity, for ever.

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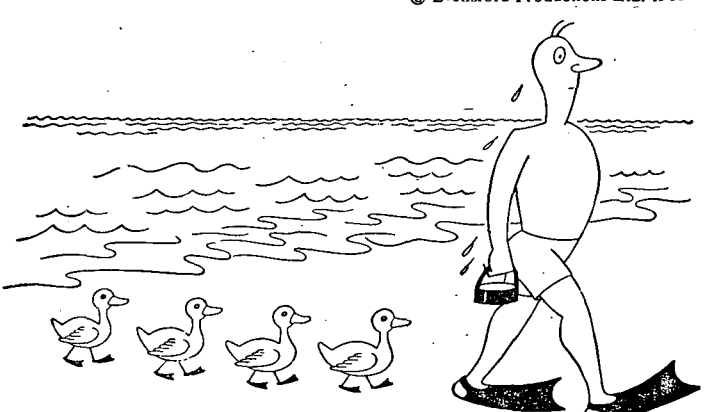

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Ekaterina

by Jack Cope

COMING in to Athens. The man in the next seat tucked away some papers, looking bored.

"Air travel simply folds up one's ideas of place, time, country," I said to him.

"Country, whaddyer mean?"

"I mean there aren't countries any more, not in the old sense. No two places are more than twenty-four hours apart. It's a matter of time before the borders just fade."

He laughed.

"What's so strange about that?" I said. "And yet where I come from there are still people who measure distance in days. 'He lives two days off towards the sunset.' Two days' walk, that is."

"Sounds prehistoric, to me."

"Sure, it is."

The man was an American and I had to explain what things were like in some parts of Africa. I'd been around the wilder places in my fifty years and I knew conditions.

"Fifty!" he said. "I never reckoned you wus that old."

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"See what I mean. I've stepped out of my age too. I'm the same as you. How old do you reckon yourself?"

"Thirty-one."

"Think again. Every day we break new barriers. We've shattered the fourth dimension but our minds haven't caught up. We don't know what's come over us, like juveniles, dangerous adolescents. The world's shrunk up. It's no bigger than England was to Jonathan Swift."

He thought me slightly off the beam. "Coming from South Africa, I guess you should be black and speak Zulu," he said.

"I do," was my answer.

He was leaving the aircraft at Athens and we broke off without any regrets. He could not suspect that I was fighting against the anti-climax of a return to Johannesburg. Only twelve hours distant; what was twelve hours when the place felt ten thousand leagues away, set apart from the small, fast-shifting world? In Africa, time and dimensions held on stubbornly.

I had not before been through Athens and I ran down the steps to get my feet for the first time on Greek soil. Here Euripides might have walked, or Aristophanes. It needed all the strength of faith. Back beyond the present, beyond the waste of an international airport, perhaps they saw from here these same white and gold hills, breathed in this air. I stepped on the little trolley and was hauled swiftly away by the motor barrow. Late afternoon and a luminous early summer glow on the white hills. Over the fumes of hot oil and engine gas I had the illusion of spice-scented air. Then the monotonous airport building closed over my fellow passengers and me.

I stopped at a bar for a drink, and wandered through the terminal entrance. Marigolds and small papery plants survived in the dry, dusty beds. Athens itself lay miles distant, and now I felt this was a lost chance and I might never return. Greece and the sacred islands . . . girls leading a heifer to the festival with garlands about its horns . . . the Athenians who had blazed through thousands of years their conviction that man was the beauty of the world.

An undersized youth with decayed teeth and slicked-back dark hair plucked me by the sleeve to offer me sex pictures. Like the airport, the smell of oil, and the faceless passengers, he was a world symbol. Could anyone say he was not from the blood of ancestors who fought at Marathon? My American co-traveller rushed past to snap up a taxi; he gave me a last grin and a wave.

Then a little bewildered party came fluttering among the crowd across the wide airport vestibule. In poor, best clothing,

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the big red hands of the men hung from over-long sleeves. Women with headscarves over their hair carried small bundles and boxes and one trailed a flashy, cheap travelling-case. A young girl at the centre of them swept large eyes, dark and dazed, over the utter strangeness of everything. A light yellow costume hung uncomfortably new about her shoulders and the pleated skirt swung to her sturdy walk. She looked direct at me with the same bewilderment, smiled and then turned away. Her profile was good, a line like Flaxman's, almost soulless and too perfect, a short straight nose and strict but soft modelling of the lips. She had sprinkled in the thick black swathes of her hair a ring of small flowers white and star-like. The procession was swallowed at a gulp among the echoes and hurrying and aseptic smells of the air terminal.

The light still caught on the ring of ancient hills, silver-green olives on the slopes darkening as the sun sank lower. When the same sun rose again for me it would be red and wintry over the goldmines, the great pale yellow dumps and winding gears of the East Rand. Why not step off here like my air-mate from San Francisco; find some age-still village in the Plain of Thessaly, or a hut in the hills? Maybe Greece never had lost its magic and there was a reconciliation, a way back and a way forward, and like a pilgrim you need reach it only once.

Warnings were echoing over the call system. I ran for the trolley and climbed on as it moved. Slants of sunlight streaked the concrete apron. As we came near, the smooth belly of the waiting aircraft flashed in our eyes. I did not look back but ducked through the open hatch door, the last aboard.

At my place aft of the wing I found the next seat, left empty by the American, now taken by the girl of the little procession. She stood up at once, rosy and seeming to glow in the light through the portholes, and she gave me her hand. Each slight movement of hers had a fluency of nature, of some half-tame unobserved creature. Her greeting sounded with a charm of the unknown. There had been tears in her eyes.

Back in her seat, she was at once straining through the double-window of the cabin for a glimpse of the minute dim figures far away across the runway. A tightly squeezed handkerchief unfolded in her hand and fluttered at the porthole. Nobody would see that final gesture. A gritty shudder of the starting motors vibrated the airliner. The flowers in the girl's hair were orange blossoms and the hand at the window had the shining gold band of a new wedding ring.

She cried in silence, and the whole giant stir of taking off from her native ground was nothing to the turmoil inside herself.

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The machine rumbled out along the communicating strips, wheeled on a great arc and stood poised for flight, trembling under its power. We were skimming the ground and spurts of black smoke coughed from the motors. The last upward heave came and then the sense of ease as we swung away towards the small salmon-coloured clouds beyond the edge of the land. The sea opened blue-dark below, and far-off west over a point of smoky land the path of the setting sun lay on the water.

The wonder of this first flight broke in suddenly on the girl. Her mouth was open. She looked around and touched the curtain and the window as if to confirm her own doubting senses. When she caught my eye it was with a little burst of laughter, startled and greatly moved. She said something quietly, shaking her head. Tears glistened on her lashes but the weight had lifted from her sad and lonely heart, and a minute later she touched my arm and was trying excitedly to point out something on the land. I gazed past her through the porthole. Athens was going down in a blur into the sea and the night. Two ships, shrunk to leaves on a pond, trailed the faint streaks of their wake. Already we had topped the level of the clouds and in the enormous distance they were strung out small like a line of home-going flamingos.

I thought I would get back to the magazine I was reading. There was no way of making polite talk, and to look at her simply because she was very good to look at seemed equally pointless. She was quite unconscious of the difficulty, and when she had dried her eyes and folded up her handkerchief tight as a small wad and tucked it in her bosom, she seemed tranquil and ready to explore the strangeness around her.

"Ekaterina," she said, tapping her chest.

I told her my name—Neil, Neil Gordon. This called for another handshake and she was delighted at so easily making herself understood. Using a range of gestures and expressions I got across to her in answer to her questions that I was not an Englishman, nor a German, nor an American but a citizen of Johannesburg.

"A! Yoannisburg!" Of course, that was where she too was bound for. How lucky, how wonderful, how strange! It was one of these, or maybe all of them, that fitted her look. She clapped her hands together and narrowed her eyes. We were fairly launched on a companionship at once intimate and warm as if the same rocky hills had raised and sheltered us, if not the identical hut. She chattered away softly. Her face changed, shadowed at times, and her lips glowed. Unthinkingly she turned the ring on her finger, looking downcast. Then she smiled

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mysteriously, remembering something, and went on talking.

It did not matter that she was not understood at all. I could feel the flow in her words, consoling, inevitable, reaching out for strength. So a child talks to herself in the night or a mother tells her thoughts to her baby. I could not be wrong about her. For a moment she looked at me full but with eyes that stayed dark and inward. As she paused, I said she was like my idea of Andromache or Iphigenia.

No, she was neither Andromache nor Iphigenia. She was, "E-kat-er-i-na," vigorously shaking her head. I did not dare smile but the girl felt swiftly that she had said something comic and she burst out laughing.

"Neil . . . Yoannisburg," she said at last, meaning, who could say, that some day I might tell her what it was all about.

The air hostess was passing and I stopped to ask if she understood any Greek.

"Not a bloomin' word," she said in a ripe Transvaal accent. But there was a gentleman down the aisle at the back who looked like a Greek and she would speak to him.

A minute later she was back. The passenger was not a Greek. He was an Italian. But he was quite willing to exchange places with me and entertain the young lady.

"Tell him," I said, "to go to hell, al'inferno, malebolge and all the rest. . ."

The lights had come on and it was warm in the aircraft. The motors hummed drowsily; from the height of seven miles the horizon had receded to a luminous mauve band and a few faint stars were framed in the violet space of the window. The girl took off the jacket of her costume, and she was wearing under it a delicately embroidered blouse or bodice of fine linen and no other garment apparently or underwear. She invited me to admire the blouse, smiling, and turned about to display its points. Clearly it was made by her and into it had gone her endless hours of patience. Unlike the poor factory-made yellow costume, it was a thing of character and perhaps traditional taste. I praised her extravagantly and she watched my expression keenly and with a slight flush.

Her eyes had turned grave and she sat thinking, smoothed down her skirt and even bent to flick the dust off her flashy, black shoes. She made up her mind and took from her bag a square notebook. Out of it came her passport which she put in my hands. It was a passport of my own country with familiar wording in English and Afrikaans. A frightened little face, not remotely like the beautiful Ekaterina, peered out from the

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photograph. How did she come to be a citizen of South Africa? She had not been there nor ever set foot outside her lovely and poverty-wracked Hellas.

But there was not much difficulty getting this across to me. She had changed her nationality by the simple process of marrying a fellow-citizen of mine. The marriage had taken place that morning. And her husband? He was in Yoannisburg. She would meet him there. She had never seen him. Vehemently she shook her head. The marriage had been by proxy and her brother had stood in for the bridegroom. It had been arranged by her parents. I could piece it all together. The husband had paid for everything. He had paid for her. He had sent money for the air passage. Her clothes were her dowry. The consul had issued her the passport and immigration permit. Her face burnt and she gripped the documents tightly.

Dinner was coming up in half an hour but I called for a bottle of Bollinger, congratulated her, and drank to her happiness. It seemed the least one could do. The Italian passenger came and leaned over the seat. I told him Ekaterina had been married that morning and invited him to join in drinking to her health. He tried Italian, French, Spanish, and German on her but she only looked back at him, startled.

" I'm sorry, signor, that's all Greek to her," I said.

He ignored this, raised his glass and insisted on kissing her hand, small and strong and toughened by work.

" Whatever may be her family, she ees too beautiful," he said. " Are you her chaperon? "

I said on the contrary that I was doing my best to carry her off and had a very good chance of success.

" She ees simply a child."

" I know how old she is, I've just seen her passport. Do you still want to entertain her, signor? "

He shrugged with no sign of humour, drained off his glass and wandered back to his seat. Ekaterina said something and smiled. She sipped at the champagne and in a moment was back in her own thoughts. She was small in stature, not much above five feet, but this took nothing from an effect more striking because it was unstudied. So timeless, so inviolate, the total gulf of understandable words between her and anyone else in the airliner seemed to add to her spell. The faint visible beat of her pulse and a slight sheen of dark hair on her forearms alone brought her, for me, into the actual present.

She turned to me seriously, troubled. She had made up her mind to something, and this raised her doubt. It was a slow, firm gesture she made with her hand as if she appealed for

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support in a sacred and grave cause. Then she calmly unwrapped a photograph and handed it to me. The print, postcard-sized, was of a young man about twenty-eight or thirty. He had dark hair massed thickly over a broad, flat forehead; the face was generous in a way; rugged but not handsome, and the eyes had a gentle watchfulness that attracted me. The print had been trimmed at the sides but enough was left to show the young man was leaning with his back to a shining, new motor car.

"Who?" It was her husband, of course, whom she had never seen. She told me his name: Savvas Athanassiades. I had not glanced up from the portrait but I knew she was watching me, dead still and tense. Judging by the car, Savvas was unusually short, certainly not more than five feet. I had owned a car like that myself, before the war. Why the bridegroom wanted himself snapped propping up a thirty-year-old car was his own business, no doubt, and I had nothing to say, even if I could make Ekaterina understand.

"Very good." I wanted her to get the idea that I was pleased in a noncommittal way. "Homme honnête, galantuomo, a grand fellow. Here's to Savvas Athanassiades."

I had avoided her eyes, splashing champagne again into the two glasses, and when I raised mine to her I knew her intuition had been sharply alerted. Some power of belief in women can defy the outward laws of nature, of logic, and the physical senses. Belief passes over into a child of emotion.

Ekaterina's look said she was not believing. It was a kind of unflickering regard, her mouth set as if cut in Italian rose marble and her straight nose and brow smooth and static. Then she lowered her eyes and sighed. Very deliberately she wrapped and put away the picture of Savvas. She noticed her glass and raised it with a nod. "Yoannisburg," she said.

"Athena," was my toast.

She repeated it and added with a grave, sad smile, "Vari."

I did not know where Vari was and tried to picture it as a small and ancient town built around an amphitheatre of crumbling golden stone. But the image its name fished up was of a smoky industrial waste with a thousand huddled streets. Vari. But wherever or whatever it was it still possessed a power and a mystery from the past and in it she had left her dreams.

The dinner was served to each passenger on a plastic tray with neat hygienic containers and wrappings and capsules. Tasteless and characterless, the kind of meal anyone can start where he likes and end with the same sense of disillusion. Ekaterina got through it by watching and imitating. I showed her how to hold her knife and fork and she managed without any show of

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embarrassment. She was slightly flushed by the wine and glanced at me from time to time beatifically. She was on cloud-bearing Olympus before a feast of ambrosia.

We came down at Khartoum and left the airliner while it was inspected and sprayed against flies or mosquitoes. The vivid African night folded about us, stifling and with unnameable scents. Ekaterina kept close as we trailed across the tarmac apron. Everywhere the smells followed us, and the heat; dazed sticky flies staggered across the dirty tabletops of the restaurant. The passengers drank lukewarm lemonade that tasted of scented soap. The girl gazed at the tall white-robed waiters with red fezes and sashes carrying their tall glass jugs of nauseous liquid. A hawker draped before her a length of trashy Japanese rayon and her eyes lit with delight and regret.

I offered to present it to her and she refused softly, shaking her head, no, no, no. She thanked me but no, it was impossible. Not because I was a stranger, that was not it. Why? Maybe because she could not give anything back. The heat was well up in the hundreds and she fanned herself with a limp handkerchief. The hawker slipped into her hand a bamboo fan. It was worth a few cents and I got no change out of a pound, but it was worth it; that was different, a necessity.

The aircraft took off again, lifting up and up over sleeping Africa. The last lights swam heavily into oblivion. For a while the Nile lay like spilt quicksilver catching the moon's reflection until it too merged with the black earth, and we went on climbing alone into the milky-luminous sky. The cabin light was switched down to a few dim points and the whole human cargo shuffled restlessly, settling back in the cramped space to snatch at sleep. Ekaterina curled up facing the porthole and I dozed back, horribly uncomfortable, one knee jammed against the seat ahead and the other leg sprawled for space into the aisle.

A huge African with three tiers of chins and a shaved head, a diplomat of one of the new states, snored in a basso-profondo behind me.

Maybe half an hour farther down the spine of the continent I woke drowsily. Like a newborn calf or a puppy Ekaterina had snuggled against me. One arm was flung round my neck and her face was half buried in my shoulder. A warm sweet scent came from her like buttercups or the deep new loam behind a plough. She was fast asleep—and her soul had taken flight, back to Vari, back to a street of quiet, frightened little cots, to a single room full of sisters and brothers, with a goat on the floor, and a lamb, a dog or two maybe, and chickens roosting. I wondered if she had ever slept alone. Who was I in her sleep,

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who was held in her poor arms? A little brother who would not be consoled, or a sister restless with hunger?

I could not think how this lovely child could have been sold, or sold herself, to an unknown groom—Savvas Athanassiades, possibly a worthy and honourable man who had earned his place in the privileged caste of a privileged state. And now he stretched back into the past, beyond the age of Byron, beyond the Turkish conquest to the medieval darkness, and he took a bride like this of his own race, of the imperishable blood of Greece. Let him only be worthy of her, a hero, a damn Greek god and not, as the old joke goes, a goddam Greek. Half drugged with weariness and speed and the impact on one's system of flight in the stratosphere, I could not check this dizzy spin of my thoughts. It was not easy to say that the girl, Ekaterina, was nothing to me when she was actually asleep and warm and living against my body.

I think I had dozed off and, waking, I found Ekaterina had not moved. But she too was now wide awake and her full eyes were fixed darkly on me. How long had she stared at me like that?

"Hullo, Ekaterina," I said thickly.

"Ello." Then she closed her eyes and drawing her arms tighter settled her face back to sleep.

"Ekaterina, I'm talking to you."

A faint movement of her head showed she was awake.

"Listen, it may be a good thing you don't understand. Listen, Ekaterina, you shouldn't be here. Go back, take the first chance to go back. Everyone can make a mistake. This may turn out well, but it's a risk and a humiliation. It's a false step from the beginning and won't save anybody. You're not a piece of property, you're not a prisoner. No one knows what freedom is until they've had it taken away. Go back and learn to be free. They've taken the past from you and you are throwing aside the future. Ekaterina, don't run away; you must know it's better always and always to perish fighting."

I was wandering along like this, talking not loud but almost to myself. She could not have understood a word and nobody else could distinguish anything above the drone of the engines. Something in my tone may have entered her and once again I had to realise how tense and alert and sensitive she really was. She began crying.

The great airliner bored into the silken blackness. Under us lay Africa, a giant, snoring on the long night wind. A green light showed in the dark out along the wing and from the pilot's cockpit away up forrad I thought I could catch the monotony of

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a nasal human voice. What message was cutting up through the thin envelope of air? Far below, men and women slept in the heat like dead; mosquitoes whined over them and spiders and centipedes moved in the grass . . .

Ekaterina cried quietly, but not for long, as if weeping were too great a luxury for one so simple and used to suffering. She took my hand and kissed it before I could draw away, a modest and grateful little show of feelings but to me almost unbearable. Then she wiped her eyes and nose innocently on the back of her hand, talking brightly like a playful child. She seemed shy that I might see in her grief a weakness, and for a few minutes she sat primly in her own seat and tried to hold up her head independently. Soon she was nodding to sleep again. Her body slackened and her arms drowsily reached out again, instinctively protective and loving.

We came in over the Transvaal before dawn. A haze of tiny lights struggled up from some town on the veld, and beyond it like a thin red dagger a veld-fire crept somewhere over the hills. Then the horizon began to gather rose and lilac tints and soon the flat earth itself was coming up out of the void. The passengers began waking and stirring.

I went aft to plug in an electric shaver and to dash the sleep out of my eyes. When I got back to my seat I found Ekaterina in a commotion. She had lost something; she was searching everywhere; the air hostess was drawn in, hunting too though she did not know what for. The Greek girl whimpered and fluttered her hands, and tears stood bright in her big dark eyes. Nobody could make out what it was all about. The Italian passenger was there chivalrously down on his hands and knees to help in the rummaging.

" What are you after, signor? " I asked him.

" Something has been lost."

" But what? You look like a Mussulman in search of his God."

He got to his feet, looking furiously at me.

" The girl is in a state. What have you done to her? "

" Signor, you have not slept well? "

" Slept! I can never sleep on these . . . these aviation trips."

" You should travel by camel."

He went back to his seat. Ekaterina appealed to me but I had no more idea than anyone else what she had lost. Whatever it was, perhaps it had gone at Khartoum.

" Khartoum! " She threw up her hands. She had been robbed, no doubt, by the Sudanese. She was beginning to lament this injustice until a passenger down the aisle held up a roll of

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newspapers tied with string. Ah, that was it—yesterday's Greek papers. She had brought them all the way for Savvas to read. Athena in the evening, Yoannisburg next morning. A miracle for the good Athanassiades.

I helped her down with her bags and packages. Her face was ivory in the frosty air and she hugged her thin overcoat around her, looking about fearfully. At the immigration barrier we got separated and I did not see her again until I came out in the main concourse of the airport building. There were some palms in pots, a kiosk, and groups of green leather lounge chairs, and beyond them I saw Ekaterina among a party of four or five people. Her head was bowed and her face hidden in her hands.

I could not make out which was Savvas; there was nobody answering the likeness in the picture.

Ekaterina raised her head and stared around. Then she saw me and came running down the hall. She approached impulsively and laid her forehead like a child against my chest, sobbing. The melancholy little group of strangers looked on from a distance. People sauntered past, talking and laughing; loudspeakers blared out an announcement.

Now I saw that Savvas was there, the bridegroom himself. He was carrying a black hat in one hand and with the other he wiped a handkerchief over his head. It was unquestionably Athanassiades, and he was quite bald and aged and very fat, almost as fat as he was tall. I had half expected it. I had thought he would look older than in the photograph, but not exactly like this.

" All right, Ekaterina. I'll help you get back if you wish, home, to Athena, Vari . . . "

I gave her my card and she gazed at it through blurred eyes. She gripped my hand firmly for a moment, then she dried her eyes and with a nod to me she walked back slowly and her head was held high with a great dignity.

My son and daughter-in-law found me there staring at Ekaterina's retreating back.

" Who's that beautiful little statue? " Loraine asked.

" Ekaterina."

" Is it a romance? "

" I don't know. It looks to me more like an unhappy ending, Loraine, like Iphigenia."

They were both amused and joked with me over breakfast in the large brashly-cheerful restaurant.

" It's just possible you got it all wrong. After all, you could not understand, and you had to use your imagination to fill in the gaps."

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" My instinct."

" That's just it, you can't trust to instinct. Only a woman can risk that."

I should have spoken to Savvas Athanassiades and now I do not know where to find him. His name is not in the directory. I have waited to hear from Ekaterina, but nothing. Not a word. Where is she? I remember how she walked away with her head up, calmly but not defiantly. Her dark shining hair, the yellow of her costume—" Freely now I sink in night . . . " Yet Loraine may be proved right, that I let my imagination run wild. I have heard nothing, and it is now four days. © Jack Cope 1963

CAT'S WHISKERS

The cats of Athens, like the citizens, are very intelligent. Just after the war I used to eat almost every night in an open-air taverna in the Plaka. One end of the garden was separated by a high wall from an outdoor cinema, and at the same moment every night, a huge black and white tom-cat stalked over the tiles to sit with his back towards us on this wall, intent and immobile except for the slow rhythmic sway of his hanging tail. After exactly five minutes he would saunter away again over the roofs.

The waiter's verdict on this procedure was obviously correct: " He comes for the Mickey Mouse every night," he explained. " You could set your watch by him."

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR, *Mani*

There was a young curate of Kew,
Who kept a Tom cat in a pew;
He taught it to speak
Alphabetical Greek,
But it never got further than μ.

ANON

The most enjoyable purely literary event that she [Elinor Glyn] attended was a literary lunch at the Dorchester Hotel in March, 1939. Elinor was a guest speaker and she wore, with fine panache, her huge Persian cat Candide, asleep, round her neck instead of a fox fur. During the speeches Candide would open a baleful and somewhat desiccating eye upon the speaker and then go to sleep again. " Great success! " commented Elinor in her diary.

ANTHONY GLYN, *Elinor Glyn*

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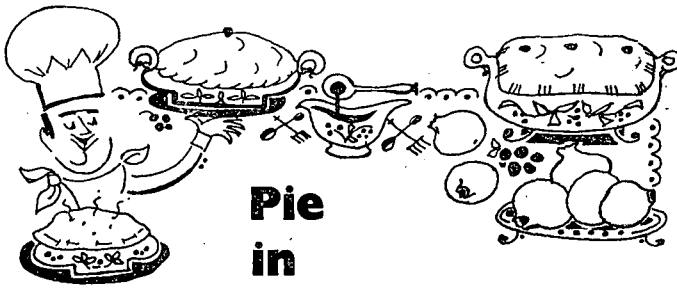

Pie in your eye

"Bunches of grapes," says Timothy,
"Pomegranates pink," says Elaine;
"A junket of cream and a cranberry tart
For me," says Jane.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Bunches of Grapes*

In Massachusetts all the way
From Boston down to Buzzards Bay
They feed you till you want to die
On rhubarb pie and pumpkin pie,
And horrible huckleberry pie,
And when you summon strength to cry,
"What is there else that I can try?"
They stare at you in mild surprise
And serve you other kinds of pies.

HILAIRE BELLOC, *On Food*

Pie-ce de résistance

But that pie was a job; we had no end of trouble with that pie. We fixed it up away down in the woods, and cooked it there; and we got it done at last, and very satisfactory, too; but not in one day; and we had to use up three wash-pans full of flour, before we got through, and we got burnt pretty much all over, in places, and eyes put out with the smoke; because, you see, we didn't want nothing but a crust, and we couldn't prop it up right, and she would always cave in. But of course we thought of the right way at last; which was to cook the ladder, too, in the pie.

Uncle Silas he had a noble brass warming-pan which he

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thought considerable of, because it had belonged to one of his ancestors with a long wooden handle that came over from England with William the Conqueror in the *Mayflower*, and we snaked her out, private, and took her down there, but she failed on the first pies, because we didn't know how, but she came up smiling on the last one. We took and lined her with dough, and set her in the coals, and loaded her up with rag rope, and put on a dough roof, and shut down the lid, and in fifteen minutes she turned out a pie that was a satisfaction to look at.

But the person that eat it would want to fetch a couple of kags of toothpicks along, for if that rope-ladder wouldn't cramp him down to business, I don't know nothing what I'm talking about and lay him in enough stomach-ache to last him till next time, too.

MARK TWAIN, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Nice Work

" I think I want some pies this morning,"
Said Dick, stretching himself and yawning;
So down he threw his slate and books
And sauntered to the pastrycook's

And there he cast his greedy eyes
Round on the jellies and the pies
So to select with anxious care
The very nicest that was there.

JANE TAYLOR, *Greedy Richard*

Cascade of Pies

" What Mr. Lonkins wants is a real *deep* cherry pie," announced a lady in a tone of dramatic and honest conviction.

" Why yes, that is so," corroborated a gentleman who was apparently the Mr. Lonkins in question; " a real *deep* cherry pie."

" We had the same trouble way back in Paris," proclaimed another lady; " little Jerome and the girls don't want to eat any more *crême renversée*. I'd give anything if they could get some real cherry pie."

" Real *deep* cherry pie," assented Mr. Lonkins.

" Way down in Ohio we used to have peach pie that was real good," said Mrs. Lonkins, turning on a tap of reminiscence that presently flowed to a cascade. The subject of pies seemed to lend itself to indefinite expansion.

SAKI, *The Unbearable Bassington*

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. . . *in the Sky*

Who'll solve my problem? asks the moon
Moving across the sky
Who'll calculate my radius
And multiply by π*?*

The shining flood of light I pour
By half a world is shared
And yet this area, figured out,
Is merely πr^2

The laws of all circles must,
Unquestioning, obey
Yet lovely as a lily, I
Float heedless on my way.

My proud contention this, which once
The ancient Romans held:
Luna se movet—briefly put
The moon is self-propelled.

Night's Queen, I trace a silvery
Circumference of sky
And share my cold and regal sway
With nobody but π.

ROSIE LEE

Pumpkin Pie

Then the waiters bring on the pumpkin pie, and it is without doubt quite a large pie, and in fact it is about the size of a manhole cover, and I can see that Joel Duffle is observing this pie with a strange expression on his face, although to tell the truth I do not care for the expression on Miss Violet Shumberger's face either.

Well, the pie is cut in two dead centre, and one half is placed before Miss Violet Shumberger and the other half before Joel Duffle . . . and before she as much as touches her pie, all of a sudden Violet turns her head and motions to Nicely-Nicely to approach her, and as he approaches, she whispers in his ear.

Now at this, the Boston character by the name of Conway jumps up and claims a foul and the judge from Providence, R.I., wishes to know if Nicely-Nicely will kindly relate what passes between him and Violet so they may make a decision.

" Why," Nicely-Nicely says, " all she asks me is can I get her another piece of pie when she finishes the one in front of her."

DAMON RUNYON, *Piece of Pie*

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COME INTO MY CELLAR

Hair can't do that, he thought,
it can't do that . . . not in real life

BY RAY BRADBURY

HUGH FORTNUM woke to Saturday's commotions, and lay eyes shut, savouring each in its turn.

Below, bacon in a skillet; Cynthia waking him with fine cookings instead of cries.

Across the hall, Tom actually taking a shower.

Far off in the bumble-bee dragon-fly light, whose voice was already damning the weather, the time, and the tides? Mrs. Goodbody? Yes. That Christian giantess, six foot tall with her shoes off, the gardener extraordinary, the octogenarian-dietitian, and town philosopher.

He rose, and leaned out of the window to hear her cry, "There! Take that! This'll fix you! Hah!"

"Happy Saturday, Mrs. Goodbody!"

The old woman froze in clouds of insect-spray pumped from an immense gun. "Nonsense!" she shouted. "With these fiends and pests to watch for?"

"What kind this time?" called Fortnum.

"I don't want to shout it to the jaybirds, but—" she glanced suspiciously around—"what would you say if I told you I was the first line of defence concerning flying saucers?"

"Fine," replied Fortnum. "There'll be rockets between the worlds any year now."

"There already are!" She pumped, aiming the spray under the hedge. "There! Take that!"

He pulled his head back in from the fresh day, somehow not as high-spirited as his first response had indicated.

The doorbell rang.

He was half down the stairs when he heard a voice say, "Special delivery. Fortnum?" and saw Cynthia turn from the front door, a small packet in her hand.

He put his hand out, but she shook her head.

"Special delivery airmail for your son."

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Tom was downstairs like a centipede. "Wow! That must be from the Great Bayou Novelty Greenhouse!"

"I wish I were as excited about ordinary mail."

"Ordinary!" Tom ripped the cord and paper wildly. "Didn't you read the back page with the advertisement? Well, here *they* are!"

Everyone peered into the small open box.

"Here," said Fortnum, "*what* are?"

"The Sylvan Glade Jumbo-Giant Guaranteed-Growth Raise-Them-in-Your-Cellar-for-Big-Profit Mushrooms!"

"Oh, of course," said Fortnum. "How silly of me."

Cynthia squinted. "Those little teeny bits—?"

"Fabulous growth in twenty-four hours," Tom quoted from memory. "Plant them in your own cellar—"

Fortnum and wife exchanged glances.

"Well," she admitted, "it's better than frogs and snakes."

"Sure is!" Tom ran.

The cellar door slammed.

Fortnum, bemused, scanned the wrapper a moment, then dropped it into the waste-paper basket. On his way to the kitchen, he opened the cellar door.

Tom was already on his knees, digging with a hand-rake in the earth floor of the back part of the cellar.

He felt his wife beside him, breathing softly, looking down into the cool dimness.

"Those *are* mushrooms, I hope. Not . . . toadstools?"

Fortnum laughed. "Happy harvest, farmer!"

Tom glanced up and waved.

Fortnum shut the door, took his wife's arm, and walked her out to the kitchen, feeling fine.

Towards noon, Fortnum was driving towards the nearest market when he saw Roger Willis, the teacher of biology at the high school, waving urgently from the pavement.

Fortnum pulled up his car and opened the door.

"Hi, Roger, give you a lift?"

Willis responded all too eagerly, jumping in and slamming the door.

"Just the man I want to see. I've put off calling for days. Could you play psychiatrist for five minutes?"

Fortnum examined his friend for a moment as he drove quietly on. "Yes. Shoot."

Willis sat back and studied his fingernails. "Let's just drive a moment. There. O.K. Here's what I want to say: something's wrong with the world."

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Fortnum laughed easily. "Hasn't there always been?"

"No, no, I mean . . . something strange—something unseen—is happening."

"Mrs. Goodbody—" he said, half to himself, and stopped.

"Mrs. Goodbody?"

"This morning. Gave me a talk on flying saucers."

"No." Willis bit the knuckle of his forefinger nervously. "Nothing like saucers. At least I don't think. Tell me, what is intuition?"

"The conscious recognition of something that's been subconscious for a long time. But don't quote this amateur psychologist!" He laughed again.

"Good, good!" Willis turned, his face lighting. He readjusted himself in the seat. "That's it! Over a long period, things gather, right? All of a sudden, you have to spit, but you don't remember saliva collecting. Your hands are dirty, but you don't know how they got that way. Dust falls on you every day and you don't feel it. But when you get enough dust collected up, there it is, you see and name it. That's intuition, as far as I'm concerned. Well, what kind of dust has been falling on me? A few meteors in the sky at night? Funny weather just before dawn? I don't know. Certain colours, smells, the way the house creaks at three in the morning? Hair prickling on my arms? All I know is, the damn dust *has* collected. Quite suddenly I *know*."

"Yes," said Fortnum, disquieted. "But what *is* it you know?"

Willis looked at his hands in his lap.

"I'm afraid. I'm not afraid. Then I'm afraid again, in the middle of the day. Doctor's checked me. I'm A1. No family problems. Joe's a fine boy, a good son. Dorothy? She's remarkable. With her, I'm not afraid of growing old or dying."

"Lucky man."

"But beyond my luck now. Scared stiff, really, for myself, my family; even, right now, for you."

"Me?" said Fortnum.

They had stopped now by an empty carpark near the market. There was a moment of great stillness, in which Fortnum turned to survey his friend. Willis' voice had suddenly made him cold.

"I'm afraid for everybody," said Willis. "Your friends, mine, and their friends, on out of sight. Pretty silly, eh?"

Willis opened the door, got out and peered in at Fortnum. Fortnum felt he had to speak.

"Well—what do we *do* about it?"

Willis looked up at the sun burning blind in the great remote

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sky. "Be aware," he said slowly. "Watch everything for a few days."

"Everything?"

"We don't use half what God gave us, ten per cent of the time. We ought to hear more, feel more, smell more, taste more. Maybe there's something wrong with the way the wind blows these weeds there in the carpark. Maybe it's the sun up on those telephone wires or the cicadas singing in the elm trees. If only we could stop, look, listen, a few days, a few nights, and compare notes. Tell me to shut up then and I will."

"Good enough," said Fortnum, playing it lighter than he felt. "I'll look around. But how do I know the thing I'm looking for when I see it?"

Willis peered in at him sincerely. "You'll know. You've got to know. Or we're done for, all of us," he said quietly.

Fortnum shut the door, and didn't know what to say. He felt a flush of embarrassment creeping up his face. Willis sensed this.

"Hugh, do you think I'm—off my rocker?"

"Nonsense!" said Fortnum, too quickly. "You're just nervous that's all. You should take a couple of weeks off."

Willis nodded. "See you Monday night?"

"Any time. Drop round."

"I hope I will, Hugh. I really hope I will."

Then Willis was gone, hurrying across the dry weed-grown carpark, towards the side entrance of the market.

Watching him go, Fortnum suddenly did not want to move. He discovered that very slowly he was taking deep breaths, weighing the silence. He licked his lips, tasting the salt. He looked at his arm on the door, the sunlight burning the golden hairs. In the empty carpark the wind moved all alone to itself. He leaned out to look at the sun which stared back with one massive stunning blow of intense power that made him jerk his head in.

He exhaled. Then he laughed out loud. Then he drove away.

The lemonade glass was cool and deliciously sweaty. The ice made music inside the glass, and the lemonade was just sour enough, just sweet enough on his tongue. He sipped, he savoured, he tilted back in the wicker rocking-chair on the twilight front porch, his eyes closed. The crickets were chirping out on the lawn. Cynthia, knitting across from him on the porch, eyed him curiously. He could feel the pressure of her attention.

"What are you up to?" she said at last.

"Cynthia," he said, "is your intuition in running order?

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Is this earthquake weather? Is the land going to sink? Will war be declared? Or is it only that our delphinium will die of the blight?"

"Hold on. Let me feel my bones."

He opened his eyes and watched Cynthia in turn closing hers and sitting absolutely statue-still, her hands on her knees. Finally she shook her head and smiled.

"No. No war declared. No land sinking. Not even a blight. Why?"

"I've met a lot of Doom Talkers today. Well, two anyway, and—" The screen door burst wide. Fortnum's body jerked as if he had been struck. "What!"

Tom, a wooden box in his arms, stepped out on the porch.

"Sorry," he said. "What's wrong, Dad?"

"Nothing." Fortnum stood up, glad to be moving. "Is that the crop?"

Tom moved forward, eagerly. "Part of it. Boy, they're doing great. In just seven hours, with lots of water, look how big the darn things are!" He set the box on the table between his parents.

The crop was indeed plentiful. Hundreds of small greyish brown mushrooms were sprouting up in the damp soil.

"I'll be damned," said Fortnum, impressed.

Cynthia put out her hand to touch the box, then took it away uneasily. "I hate to be a spoilsport, but . . . there's no way for these to be anything else but mushrooms, is there?"

Tom looked as if he had been insulted. "What do you think I'm going to feed you? Poison fungoids?"

"That's just it," said Cynthia quickly. "How do you tell them apart?"

"Eat 'em," said Tom. "If you live, they're mushrooms. If you drop dead—*well!*"

He gave a great guffaw, which amused Fortnum, but only made his mother wince. She sat back in her chair.

"I—I don't like them," she said.

"Boy, oh, boy." Tom seized the box angrily. "When are we going to have the next Wet Blanket Sale in *this* house?" He shuffled morosely away.

"Tom—" said Fortnum.

"Never mind," said Tom. "Everyone reckons they'll be ruined by the boy entrepreneur. To heck with it!"

Fortnum got inside just as Tom heaved the mushrooms, box and all, down the cellar stairs. He slammed the cellar door and ran angrily out.

Fortnum turned back to his wife who, stricken, glanced away.

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"I'm sorry," she said. "I don't know why. I just *had* to say that to Tom."

The phone rang. Fortnum brought the phone outside on its extension cord.

"Hugh?" It was Dorothy Willis' voice. She sounded suddenly very old and very frightened. "Hugh, Roger isn't there, is he?"

"Dorothy? No."

"He's gone!" said Dorothy. "All his clothes were taken from the cupboard." She began to cry softly.

"Dorothy, hold on, I'll be there in a minute."

"You must help, oh, you must. Something's happened to him, I know it," she wailed. "Unless you do something, we'll never see him alive again."

Very slowly, he put the receiver back on its hook, her voice weeping inside it. The night crickets, quite suddenly, were very loud. He felt the hairs, one by one, go up on the back of his neck. Hair can't do that, he thought. Silly, silly. It can't do that, not in real life, it can't!

But, one by slow prickling one, his hair did . . .

The wire hangers were indeed empty. With a clatter, Fortnum shoved them aside and down along the rod, then turned and looked at Dorothy Willis and her son Joe.

"I was just walking by," said Joe, "and saw the clothes cupboard empty, all Dad's things gone!"

"Everything was fine," said Dorothy. "We've had a wonderful life. I don't understand it, I don't, I don't!" She began to cry again, putting her hands to her face.

Fortnum turned away from the cupboard.

"You didn't hear him leave the house?"

"We were playing catch out at the front," said Joe. "Dad said he had to go in for a minute. I went round to the back. Then—he was gone!"

"He must have packed quickly and walked wherever he was going, so we wouldn't hear a cab pull up in front of the house."

They were moving out through the hall now.

"I'll check the railway station and the airport." Fortnum hesitated. "Dorothy, is there anything in Roger's background—"

"It wasn't insanity took him." She hesitated. "I feel—somehow—he was kidnapped."

Fortnum shook his head. "It doesn't seem reasonable that he would arrange to pack, walk out of the house, and go to meet his abductors."

Dorothy opened the door as if to let the night or the night wind

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move down the hall as she turned to stare back through the rooms, her voice wandering. "No. Somehow they came into the house. Right in front of us, they stole him away."

And then, ". . . a terrible thing has happened."

Fortnum stepped out into the night of crickets and rustling trees. The Doom Talkers, he thought, talking their Dooms. Mrs. Goodbody. Roger. And now Roger's wife. Something terrible *has* happened. But what, in God's name? And how?

He looked from Dorothy to her son. Joe, blinking the wetness from his eyes, took a long time to turn, walk along the hall and stop, fingering the knob of the cellar door.

Fortnum felt his eyelids twitch, his iris flex, as if he were snapping a picture of something he wanted to remember.

Joe pulled the cellar door wide, stepped down out of sight, gone. The door tapped shut.

Fortnum opened his mouth to speak, but Dorothy's hand was taking his now, he had to look at her.

"Please," she said. "Find him for me."

He kissed her cheek. "If it's humanly possible . . ."

If it's humanly possible. Good lord, why had he picked those words?

He walked off into the summer night . . .

A gasp, an exhalation, a gasp, an exhalation, an asthmatic insuck, a vapouring sneeze. Someone dying in the dark? No.

Just Mrs. Goodbody, unseen beyond the hedge, working late, her hand-pump aimed, her bony elbow thrusting. The sick-sweet smell of insecticide enveloped Fortnum heavily.

"Mrs. Goodbody? Still at it?"

From the black hedge, her voice leapt, "Damn it, yes! Aphides, water-bugs, woodworms, and now the marasmius oreades. Lord, it grows fast!"

"What does?"

"The marasmius oreades, of course! It's me against them, and I intend to win. There! There! There!"

He left the hedge, the gasping pump, the wheezing voice, and found his wife waiting for him on the porch almost as if she were going to take up where Dorothy had left off at her door a few minutes ago.

Fortnum was about to speak, when a shadow moved inside. There was a creaking noise. A knob rattled.

Tom vanished into the basement.

Fortnum felt as if someone had set off an explosion in his face. He reeled. Everything had the numbed familiarity of those waking dreams where all movements are remembered before they occur, all dialogue known before it falls from the lips.

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He found himself staring at the shut basement door. Cynthia took him inside, amused.

"What? Tom? Oh, I relented. The darn mushrooms meant so much to him. Besides, when he threw them into the cellar, they did nicely, just lying in the dirt."

"Did they?" Fortnum heard himself say.

Cynthia took his arm. "What about Roger?"

"He's gone, yes."

"Men, men, men," she said.

"No, you're wrong," he said. "I've seen Roger every day for the last ten years. When you know a man that well, you can tell how things are at home, whether things are in the oven or the melting-pot. Death hadn't breathed down his neck yet. He wasn't running scared after his immortal youth, picking peaches in someone else's orchards. No, no, I swear, I'd bet my last dollar on it, Roger— "

The doorbell rang behind him. The delivery boy had come up quietly on to the porch and was standing there with a telegram in his hand. "Fortnum?"

Cynthia snapped on the hall light as he ripped the envelope open and smoothed it out for reading.

TRAVELLING NEW ORLEANS STOP THIS TELEGRAM POSSIBLE OFF-GUARD MOMENT STOP YOU MUST REFUSE REPEAT REFUSE ALL SPECIAL DELIVERY PACKAGES STOP ROGER

Cynthia glanced up from the paper.

"I don't understand. What does he mean?"

But Fortnum was already at the telephone dialling swiftly, once. "Operator? The police, and hurry!"

At ten fifteen that night, the phone rang for the sixth time during the evening. Fortnum got it, and immediately gasped. "Roger! Where are you?"

"Where am I, hell," said Roger lightly, almost amused. "You know very well where I am. You're responsible for this. I should be angry!"

Cynthia, at his nod, had hurried to take the extension phone in the kitchen. When he heard the soft click, he went on.

"Roger, I swear I don't know. I got that telegram from you—"

"What telegram?" said Roger jovially. "I sent no telegram. Now, of a sudden, the police come pouring on to the southbound train, pull me off in some backwater, and I'm calling you to get them off my neck. Hugh, if this is some joke— "

"But, Roger, you just vanished!"

"On a business trip. If you can call that vanishing. I told Dorothy about this, and Joe."

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"This is all very confusing, Roger. You're in no danger? Nobody's blackmailing you, forcing you into this speech?"

"I'm fine, healthy, free, and unafraid."

"But, Roger, your premonitions . . .?"

"Poppycock! Now look, I'm being very good about this, aren't I?"

"Sure, Roger."

"Then play the good father and give me permission to go. Call Dorothy and tell her I'll be back in five days. How could she have forgotten?"

"She did, Roger. See you in five days, then?"

"Five days, I swear."

The voice was indeed winning and warm, the old Roger again. Fortnum shook his head, more bewildered than before.

"Roger," he said, "this is the craziest day I've ever spent. You're not running off from Dorothy? Good lord, you can tell *me*."

"I love her with all my heart. Now, here's the Ridgetown police. Good-bye, Hugh."

"Good— "

But a policeman was on the line, talking angrily. What had Fortnum meant putting them to this trouble? What was going on? Who did he think he was? Did or didn't he want this so-called friend held or released?

"Released," Fortnum managed to say, and hung up the phone and imagined he heard a voice call all aboard and the massive thunder of the train leaving the station two hundred miles south in the somehow increasingly dark night . . .

Cynthia walked very slowly into the parlour.

"I feel so foolish," she said.

"How do you think I feel?"

"Who could have sent that telegram? And why?"

He poured himself some Scotch and stood in the middle of the room looking at it.

"I'm glad Roger is all right," his wife said at last.

"He isn't," said Fortnum.

"But you just said— "

"I said nothing. After all, we couldn't very well drag him off that train and truss him up and send him home, could we, if he insisted he was O.K.? No. He sent that telegram, but he changed his mind after sending it. Why, why, why?" Fortnum paced the room, sipping the drink. "Why warn us against special delivery packages? The only package we've got this *year* which fits that description is the one Tom got this morning . . ." His voice trailed off.

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Before he could move, Cynthia was at the waste-paper basket taking out the crumpled wrapping paper with the special delivery stamps on it. The postmark read: NEW ORLEANS.

Cynthia looked up from it. "New Orleans. Isn't that where Roger is heading right now?"

A doorknob rattled, a door opened and closed in Fortnum's mind. Another doorknob rattled, another door swung wide and then shut. There was a smell of damp earth.

He found his hand dialling the phone. After a long while, Dorothy Willis answered at the other end. He could imagine her sitting alone in a house with too many lights on. He talked quietly with her a while, then cleared his throat and said, "Dorothy, look. I know it sounds silly. Have any special delivery airmail packages arrived at your house in the last few days?"

Her voice was faint. "No." Then: "No, wait. Three days ago. But I thought you knew! All the boys in the block are going in for it."

Fortnum measured his words carefully.

"Going in for what?"

"But why ask?" she said. "There's nothing wrong with raising mushrooms, is there?"

Fortnum closed his eyes.

"Hugh? Are you still there?" asked Dorothy. "I said: there's nothing wrong with—"

"—raising mushrooms?" said Fortnum at last. "No. Nothing wrong. Nothing wrong."

And slowly he put down the phone.

The curtains blew like veils of moonlight. The clock ticked. The after-midnight world flowed into and filled the bedroom. He heard Mrs. Goodbody's clear voice on this morning's air, a million years gone now. He heard Roger putting a cloud over the sun at noon. He heard the police damning him by phone. Then Roger's voice again, with the locomotive thunder hurrying him away and away, fading. And finally, Mrs. Goodbody's voice behind the hedge.

"Lord, it grows fast!"

"What does?"

"Marasmius oreades!"

He snapped his eyes open. He sat up.

Downstairs, a moment later, he flicked through the unabridged dictionary. His forefinger underlined the words. Marasmius oreades: a mushroom commonly found on lawns in summer and early autumn.

He let the book fall shut . . .

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Outside, in the deep summer night, he lit a cigarette and smoked quietly.

A meteor fell across space, burning itself out quickly. The trees rustled softly.

The front door tapped shut.

Cynthia moved towards him in her dressing-gown.

"Can't sleep?"

"Too warm, I guess."

"It's not warm."

"No," he said, feeling his arms. "In fact, it's cold." He sucked on the cigarette twice, then, not looking at her, said, "Cynthia . . . what if . . .?" He snorted and had to stop. "Well, what if Roger was right this morning? Mrs. Goodbody, what if she's right, too? Something terrible *is* happening. Like—well—" he nodded at the sky and the million stars—"Earth being invaded by things from other worlds, maybe."

"Hugh!"

"No, let me run wild."

"It's quite obvious we're not being invaded or we'd notice."

"Let's say we've only half noticed, become uneasy about something. What? How could we be invaded? By what means would creatures invade?"

Cynthia looked at the sky and was about to try something when he interrupted.

"No, not meteors or flying saucers. Not things we can *see*. What about bacteria? That comes from outer space, too, doesn't it?"

"I read once, yes—"

"Spores, seeds, pollens, viruses, probably bombard our atmosphere by the billion every second and have done so for millions of years. Right now we're sitting out under an invisible rain. It falls all over the country, the cities, the towns, and right now . . . our lawn."

"Our lawn?"

"And Mrs. Goodbody's. But people like her are always pulling weeds, spraying poison, kicking toadstools off their grass. It would be hard for any strange life form to survive in cities. Weather's a problem, too. Best climate might be south: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana. Back in the damp Bayous, they could grow to a fine size."

But Cynthia was beginning to laugh now.

"Oh, really, you don't believe, do you, that this Great Bayou or whatever Greenhouse Novelty Company that sent Tom his package is owned and operated by six-foot tall mushrooms from another planet?"

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"If you put it that way, it sounds funny," he admitted.

"Funny! It's hilarious!" She threw her head back deliciously.

"Good grief!" he cried, suddenly irritated. "Something's going on! Mrs. Goodbody is rooting out and killing marasmius oreades. What is marasmius oreades? A certain kind of mushroom. Simultaneously, and I suppose you'll call it coincidence, by special delivery, what arrives the same day? Mushrooms for Tom! What else happens? Roger fears he may soon cease to be! Within hours, he vanishes, then telegraphs us warning us not to accept what? The special delivery mushrooms for Tom! Has Roger's son got a similar package in the last few days? He has! Where do the packages come from? New Orleans! And where is Roger going when he vanishes? New Orleans! Do you see, Cynthia, do you see? I wouldn't be upset if all these separate things didn't lock together! Roger, Tom, Joe, mushrooms, Mrs. Goodbody, packages, destinations, everything in one pattern!"

She was watching his face now, quieter, but still amused. "Don't get angry."

"I'm not!" Fortnum almost shouted. And then he simply could not go on. He was afraid that if he did, he would find himself shouting with laughter, too, and somehow he did not want that. He stared at the surrounding houses up and down the block and thought of the dark cellars and the boys in the neighbourhood who read the advertisement and sent their money in by the million to raise the mushrooms hidden away. Just as he, when a boy, had posted off for chemicals, seeds, turtles, numberless salves and sickish ointments. In how many million homes tonight were billions of mushrooms rousing up under the ministrations of the innocent?

"Hugh?" His wife was touching his arm now. "Mushrooms, even big ones, can't think. They can't move. They don't have arms and legs. How could they run a mail-order service and take over the world? Come on, now. Let's look at your terrible fiends and monsters!"

She pulled him towards the door. Inside, she headed for the cellar, but he stopped, shaking his head, a foolish smile shaping itself somehow to his mouth. "No, no, I know what we'll find. You win. The whole thing's silly. Roger will be back next week and we'll all get drunk together. Go on up to bed now and I'll drink a glass of warm milk and be with you in a minute—well, a couple of minutes."

"That's better!" She kissed him on both cheeks, squeezed him, and went away up the stairs.

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In the kitchen, he took out a glass, opened the refrigerator, and was pouring the milk when he stopped suddenly.

Near the front of the top shelf was a small yellow dish. It was not the dish that held his attention, however. It was what lay in the dish.

The fresh-cut mushrooms.

He must have stood there for half a minute, his breath frosting the refrigerated air, before he reached out, took hold of the dish, sniffed it, felt the mushrooms, then at last, carrying the dish, went out into the hall. He looked up the stairs, hearing Cynthia moving about in the bedroom, and was about to call up to her, "Cynthia, did you put these in the refrigerator?"

Then he stopped. He knew her answer. She had not.

He put the dish of mushrooms on the newel-upright at the bottom of the stairs and stood looking at them. He imagined himself, in bed later, looking at the walls, the open windows, watching the moonlight sift patterns on the ceiling. He heard himself saying, Cynthia? And her answering, Yes? And him saying, There *is* a way for mushrooms to grow arms and legs. What, she would say, silly, silly man, what? And he would gather courage against her hilarious reaction and go on. What if a man wandered through the swamp picked the mushrooms, and *ate* them . . . ?

No response from Cynthia.

Once inside the man, would the mushrooms spread through his blood, take over every cell, and change the man from a man to a—Martian? Given this theory, would the mushroom need its own arms and legs? No, not when it could borrow people, live inside, and become them. Roger ate mushrooms given him by his son. Roger became "something else." He kidnapped himself. And in one last flash of sanity, of being "himself" he telegraphed us, warning us not to accept the special delivery mushrooms. The "Roger" that telephoned later was no longer Roger but a captive of what he had eaten! Doesn't that make sense, Cynthia? Doesn't it, doesn't it?

No, said the imagined Cynthia, no, it doesn't no, no, no . . .

There was the faintest whisper, rustle, stir from the cellar. Taking his eyes from the bowl, Fortnum walked to the cellar door and put his ear to it.

"Tom?"

No answer.

"Tom, are you down there?"

No answer.

"Tom?"

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After a long while, Tom's voice came up from below.

"Yes, Dad?"

"It's after midnight," said Fortnum, fighting to keep his voice from going high. "What are you doing down there?"

No answer.

"I said—"

"Tending to my crop," said the boy at last, his voice cold and faint.

"Well, get the hell out of there! You hear me?"

Silence.

"Tom? Listen! Did you put some mushrooms in the refrigerator tonight? If so, why?"

Ten seconds must have ticked by before the boy replied from below. "For you and Mom to eat, of course."

Fortnum heard his heart moving swiftly, and had to take three deep breaths before he could go on.

"Tom? You didn't—that is—you haven't by any chance eaten some of the mushrooms yourself, have you?"

"Funny you ask that," said Tom. "Yes. Tonight. On a sandwich after supper. Why?"

Fortnum held to the doorknob. Now it was his turn not to answer. He felt his knees beginning to melt and he fought the whole silly senseless fool thing. No reason, he tried to say, but his lips wouldn't move.

"Dad?" called Tom softly from the cellar. "Come on down." Another pause.

"I want you to see the harvest."

Fortnum felt the knob slip in his sweaty hand. The knob rattled. He gasped.

"Dad?" called Tom softly.

Fortnum opened the door.

The cellar was completely black below.

He stretched his hand in towards the light switch. As if sensing this intrusion, from somewhere Tom said, "Don't. Light's bad for the mushrooms."

Fortnum took his hand off the switch.

He swallowed. He looked back at the stairs leading up to his wife. I suppose, he thought, I should go say good-bye to Cynthia. But why should I think that? Why should I think that at all? No reason, is there?

None.

"Tom?" he said, affecting a jaunty air. "Ready or not, here I come!"

And stepping down in darkness, he shut the door.

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AGINCOURT AGAIN

The knight in question bought fish and chips on the way home

BY W. H. BOORE

HE ISN'T daft; he's different, that's all," said young Dai.

"Your Grandad—" his friend Owen began again.

"He isn't daft, he's different," Dai asserted, and just to prove his point he crunched a fist against Owen's nose. The proof, in quantity of blood, was pretty overwhelming, because Owen had a sensitive nose, and when he had soaked his own handkerchief, he borrowed Dai's which was practically as good as admitting that Dai was right all along.

"Not only isn't he daft, but he's always right," said Dai.

"Considering you can't understand what he says," Owen pointed out, "he can't ever be wrong, can he?"

"Punch-drunk," said Dai, as if it was a sort of medal awarded to the old man who was as much like Dai as two peas—or so the old man said to those who, like Dai, could fish meaning out of the mush of dissolved syllables.

Grandad was not the only issue between Dai and Owen at the time. Young Dai would have graced the throne of Henry V on which Owen so shakily sat; that was Grandad's opinion. It was that opinion which had provoked Owen to say the old man was daft. Dai himself was only a French knight of low estate and had no speaking part in the school play.

After all, what had Owen got that Dai had not, except a family connection with the music mistress and having the producer to tea three days before casting?

"I bet," Dai's mother had told Grandad, "I bet Owen's mother's Welsh cakes carried some weight with him when he was giving out the parts."

Grandad was understood to say that weight was the proper word, he having tasted some of Owen's mother's cakes himself once and not been the same man since.

All of which explains why there was a certain amount of feeling at the heart of the drama festival, so that Shakespeare would have been astonished at the vitality of the battle-scene. Grandad went on the Monday, the first of the five nights on

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which the performance was to be given. The appearance of blood gave an intensity of realism to the battle scene. It looked so much like real blood, which it was—Owen's.

"And the only key to put down his back," Owen's mother explained after the performance, "was a property, made of cardboard."

"But Owen thinking it was a real key," said Dai's mother, "the bleeding stopped at once, I noticed. Which only shows what a humbug the boy is."

As for Grandad, the old champ—he was delighted. "I'm going again on Wednesday," he said. "Real exciting it was; I'd like to see how that fight goes another time."

"Don't be silly, Father," said Dai's mother, "it was only a play."

Grandad was so scandalised that his speech grew even more unintelligible, and it took even his daughter some time to gather that he was saying, "Do you mean to tell me that they were only having us on?"

She nodded. After listening to Grandad it seemed easier than talking.

"Then why had Dai got a black eye, and why was Owen bleeding?" asked Grandad triumphantly.

"Dai's lance happened to hit Owen on the nose," she said, "and Owen's sword happened to strike Dai's face—by the way, where is Owen?"

"Gone home with his mother," said Dai. "After the show, a boot happened to hit him in the backside."

And Grandad made noises which sounded like approval.

The producer visited Owen and Dai next day, and talked earnestly with each of them. "Boys will be boys," he said to their respective mothers, but he said it as if he wondered why.

"He ought to be glad," Grandad was heard to rumble after the producer had left, "he ought to be glad there's a bit of realism coming into his play for once. It's the first time." And he continued his mumbling, in which such phrases as "have a bash" and "catch him a fourpenny one" emerged once or twice from the viscous wash of sound.

However, despite Grandad, the producer's intervention had some salutary effect, for the field was fought on Tuesday with great forbearance by both the great nations represented, although it was noticed that His Majesty King Henry V had an anachronistic plaster above his mouth. "Harry! England and Saint George!" came out with a bit of a lisp, due to the drawing effect of the dressing, and a French knight was observed to join

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the retreat with a reluctance that was overcome only by the producer hooking him from the wings with a spare pike.

The knight in question bought fish and chips on the way home —fish and chips for two, to share with Grandad. He did not buy any for the others, however much they might want them, because the gift would not be so exclusively to the glory of the old man that way. Besides, how could two talk over fish and chips if the others were all around them? And Dai and Grandad always had their supper together; Dai, somehow, was able to understand almost every word the old fellow meant to say, for they talked more with their hearts than their tongues.

"How did it go this time?" asked the old man, wiping his mouth with the last of the newspaper wrapping—for a much battered old boxer is inclined to drool.

"Same as usual," said the young hero.

Grandad looked discontented. "Can't make out what you see in that Owen cum King Henry fellow."

"Well," said Dai, reasonably enough, "life would be pretty rotten if you didn't have friends to quarrel with."

"Ah, well," said Grandad, "I'm coming again myself tomorrow night. I'm on your side, and I reckon your lot want a bit of support. After all, being as you're the French, it's an away fixture, isn't it, and you don't want to lose three times in a row. As bad as Newport in the fourth division. What will de Gaulle say?"

"Don't be silly, Dad," said Dai's mother, "you can't alter history."

"I would," said Grandad, "I would. The Princes in the Tower, for instance—I'd out that right away. And Titus Oates—as bad as the Sunday papers. Worse, really, because that was true, while they are only news."

Grandad made preparations for the Wednesday performance. He fetched out his old punchball—which had lain idle for fifty years—dubbed it Minister of Pensions, and tried to fetch it a couple of haymakers. He wept afterwards, sniffling into a dirty handkerchief until his daughter brought him a clean one, which he waved away indignantly.

"You don't want to use one until it's soiled," he said.

"What are you crying for, you daft old thing?" she asked.

"I can hit as hard as I used to," he wailed, "if I could only find the place. And there's nobody in the family left to stand up for himself now. Even the boy takes things lying down."

"I kicked Owen in the pants," Dai pointed out.

"That's what that part of him is for," said Grandad, "it stands to reason you don't keep a thing like that only for sitting on. I

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bet he didn't feel it, not really. You can't reach a man's finer feelings by kicking him in the pants. Where's your psychology?"

Dai's mother looked at Dai, tapped her forehead, and shook her head significantly.

"He's not," hissed Dai indignantly, "he's not daft. He's different, that's all."

Grandad cheered up later. He confided in Dai that he was taking his ratchet rattle with him to that night's performance.

"You can't," said Dai. "What would the orchestra say?"

"With this going," said Grandad, "it wouldn't matter."

"But Shakespeare isn't football," said Dai.

"What's the difference between 'em?" asked Grandad, and Dai could not think of one offhand.

Dai's own feelings were mixed. As a member of the family and as a member of the cast, he had some duty to both; but Grandad was Grandad and superior to both, so what could he do but keep his mouth shut and wonder, wonder greatly, what might happen that evening?

Nor was the wonder equal to the event. The performance—both sides of the footlights—was impressive indeed. Audience participation, as it is called, might be good enough for Old Time Music Hall, particularly if the applause is well rehearsed; but "Up the French" in rolling syllables accompanied by a ratchet rattle is not wanted at a school play, especially with so learned a producer with red on the hood of his gown and all that sort of thing.

Nor were cries of, "Good old Grandad," from the more philistine of the male parents present any help to the performers.

When a few cries of, "Down with the old fool," brought into existence two sides to the controversy, pandemonium was the easiest thing in the world.

The women, as fast as they could, congregated away from the mêlée. "Of course," said Owen's mother bitterly, "the ushers can't be hard on an afflicted old man, can they?"

"Particularly," Dai's mother replied, "when it is the ushers that are afflicted, and it is the old man that is afflicting them by the scruff of their necks."

"And now he's starting that rattle again," said Owen's mother.

The hubbub when the rattle was swinging was terrific.

"It's acoustics, that's what it is," said Dai's mother.

"Giving it a name don't make it reasonable," was the reply.

When the whole thing was over—the rattle removed, the actors, audience, stage-hands, producer, four constables, and two sergeants all dispersed—silence hit them like a clout.

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" What happened your side of things? " asked Grandad of Dai. He whispered, as though the aftermath of Bedlam must be treated with reverence.

" It's all your fault," said Dai's mother.

" But what happened? "

" Happened? " said Dai. He managed to break out a grin through the crust of his injuries. " Happened? I'll tell you what happened. The French won the battle of Agincourt."

Grandad nodded sagely. " Two to one on the series," he said, " that's fair enough. There's no sense in one side having its own way all the time."

Next day, the producer announced that the remaining two performances had been postponed because of a " technical hitch."

Grandad laughed until he dribbled. " How true that is," he said, " a technical itch—in young Dai's fists."

" He's right," said Dai, " he's always right. Grandad isn't daft; he's different, that's all."

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Butch the Burglar

" Don't forget to frisk the fat one. He's got one of my comics."

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Dilemma

by KEM BENNETT

THE room was like a tired soil, barren and exhausted of freshness. It had all the usual appurtenances of a dentist's waiting-room, the framed diploma on the wall, the central table with its pile of fingered magazines, a filing cabinet displaced from the surgery, too many upright, uncomfortable chairs, and against the wall farthest from the door a shabby white elephant of a settee, upholstered in cracked and lustreless leather.

From the mathematical centre of the ceiling hung a light-fitting with an ornate, tasselled silk shade dating back to the nineteen-thirties. On either side of the big fireless stove were set two easy chairs, bulbously hideous and much more modern than the rest of the furniture. With their promise of some comfort they were, regardless of their ugliness, the friendliest things in the room.

Now the room was dark, except for an oblong patch in front of the high, narrow windows which was lit by fading yellow rays from a lamp across the street. On the far side of the street stood tall old houses divided into apartments, but no lights showed through their shuttered and curtained windows. The street as a whole had the look of a lugubrious memorial to something long discredited.

The dentist came in—Anton Bardas. He was a stocky man of forty-five with a round, sad face and a bald head, wearing a knee-length double-breasted white overall tied together with tapes behind his back. He was light on his feet and fussy in his movements but he moved across the room in the darkness with assurance. At the windows he drew the heavy curtains of faded chenille, making sure that no gaps were left, and then turned about to face the door again.

Had he been asked why he had not first switched on the light, he would have been forced to the admission that habit controlled

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him, making it impossible for him to light up a room so that curious eyes from outside could see into it, even though at that moment there was nothing to hide. For nearly fifteen years Bardas had lived under the pressure of having everything to hide and he often wondered how long he could continue. His mind and purpose still seemed strong, but his body was beginning to show signs of radical intolerance of the strain; his stomach, he suspected, was either ulcerated or about to be, and he found it increasingly difficult to sleep at night.

Back at the door, Bardas pressed down the light-switch and the tasselled pinkness of the deplorable lampshade glowed rosily. Only then did the motionless man in one of the fireside armchairs say, " Good evening."

The words of the greeting hung in the air while time seemed to expand round them. Bardas, quite still, with his short, capable fingers still gripping the switch, looked at the stranger steadily. His face was composed and his mild brown eyes held only inquiring bewilderment, but this was a piece of masterly acting because he knew the identity of the man in the armchair, and the fear of that knowledge was like a dying bird in the pit of his stomach.

The stranger was exceptionally tall, roughly of Bardas' own age, dressed in a trenchcoat, bareheaded. He had a bony death's-head of a face and greying hair cut en brosse. His face was lined and marked with knowledge and experience. Dark and deep-set in the skeletal severity of his face, his eyes were impenetrably shrewd and in their depths an ember of fanaticism burnt.

In his right hand, lying casually upon the wide arm of the chair, he held an automatic pistol—the German Walther, Bardas noted, which could, unlike most automatics, be cocked with the trigger like a revolver. The pistol was not pointed at Bardas; it was simply available, and this fact, with its inference of unassailable selfconfidence, made the menace of the gaunt man fill the sad room like a powerful scent.

Bardas said, " Good evening. What can I do for you, sir? Your pistol tells me that you have not come for treatment." While he was speaking he listened to the nervous mildness of his own voice. It seemed like the voice of a stranger—was in fact the voice of a stranger, because the real Anton Bardas, well hidden behind this plump actor, was cursing and suffering, trying at the same time both to face and to ignore the implications of the stranger's presence.

The man in the chair said, " I apologise for the theatrical way of introducing myself. I was anxious not to be seen, so I came

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in like a thief. I have something to discuss with you, Dr. Bardas; can you give me half an hour of your time?"

Bardas' hand left the light-switch. The hand was sticky with perspiration and he rubbed it without thinking against his overall. He nodded, and waited.

"Would you not be more comfortable sitting down?" the stranger asked.

Bardas moved to the table, pulled out a chair and sat, groping for his cigarettes as he did so.

"My name," the gaunt man informed him, "is Tamasi—I am Colonel Tamasi. Please do not worry about the pistol. It is there only to give me control of the situation for long enough to introduce myself and explain the purpose of my being here."

Bardas had a cigarette alight. He inhaled hungrily and felt courage and anger returning, bringing with them the determination to fight and go on fighting. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he said in his quiet voice. "Why should you not be in control of the situation, pistol or no pistol?"

"I suspect that you know me, or know of me. There was a chance that you would take violent action when you found me here alone, and that I wanted to avoid at all costs."

"I cannot imagine why you should have thought that I might be violent," Bardas protested. "What do you think I am—a madman? I don't know you, Colonel Tamasi—or of you, for that matter—and I'm not in the habit of making unprovoked assaults on complete strangers."

Tamasi smiled.

"What is it that you have to say to me?" Bardas demanded, without returning the smile. He did not consider the situation humorous and could see no advantage in pretending that he did.

Tamasi was of the Karhatalom, the State Security Police. He, Bardas, was of the underground, of the freedom movement; he was, in Tamasi's language, a fascist, counter-revolutionary, terrorist, and saboteur. There was nothing to smile about.

Tamasi evidently thought otherwise. His smile turned inwards, as it were, surveying hidden knowledge and seeming to take sardonic pleasure in it. "I have come here," he said with deliberation, "to put myself at the disposal of your organisation."

Utter rejection and disgust flooded into Bardas' mind. He felt a sudden, overwhelming loathing for the man in the trench-coat; they were always like this, always tortuous, feline, and sadistic. They plied their filthy trade not with near-decent

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matter of factness, like the civil police, but with unforgivable enjoyment.

He heard his voice saying with a sort of stony nervousness, "I assure you you are making a mistake. I belong to no organisation. I am simply a dentist."

"I appreciate your motives in making the denial," Tamasi said, "but I am not going to take your 'no' for an answer—not yet, anyway. Instead I shall demonstrate the extent of my knowledge and, if I can, persuade you that you have nothing to fear from me. To begin with . . ."

He raised the hand holding the pistol, slid the magazine out of the butt, snapped back the action, and caught with easy dexterity the round ejected from the chamber before it had had time to fall more than eighteen inches. He inserted the spare round into the magazine and then laid the clip and empty pistol side by side on the table. They were now as accessible to Bardas as they were to Tamasi—perhaps, by a few inches, more so.

Bardas ached to snatch the pistol, point it between Tamasi's mocking eyes, and fire and fire again. Fifteen years! For fifteen years he had survived, and now this man was going to destroy him, rob him of those endless years, make worthless all the labour and fear and anxiety.

"I have no other arms," Tamasi was saying. "If you wish to search me, I have no objection."

"I don't want to search you," Bardas muttered. He waited, wearily, for the next development, for the next tortuousness, the next sadism.

"A month ago," Tamasi said, "you took delivery of a dental unit manufactured in Western Germany; correct?"

"Yes."

"Were you surprised to be allowed to import it?"

"Yes."

"Since you received it, what kind of service have you had from the agents?"

"Very good," Bardas admitted. He closed his eyes and added with a touch of contempt that he did not bother to conceal, "Why, is their mechanic an agent of the Security Police?"

"Yes," Tamasi said, "he is. And his weekly task is to renew the batteries in a small radio transmitter concealed in the apparatus. In an apartment across the street the Security Police have installed a receiver and tape-recorder. For a month every word spoken in your surgery has been overheard and recorded, Dr. Bardas. Would you like to see the transmitter? I could show it to you if I had a screwdriver."

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Bardas shook his head and said woodenly, "Don't bother. I believe you." At the same time his mind was racing. Had they heard something? What could they have heard? A terrible temptation to confess suddenly came upon him, out, it seemed, of nowhere. He fought it off. "If the police want to waste their time by hiding microphones in my equipment I cannot stop them," he said bitterly, "but I have nothing to hide. Has anything been heard that was incriminating? I cannot believe it."

Tamasi said, "I'm glad to be able to tell you that nothing incriminating was recorded. In fact, your conversations are almost suspiciously innocent." He smiled. "It would seem that every time a patient opens his mouth to grumble about the Government you stick your drill in it."

Bardas nodded. He was beginning to understand. They had listened for a month without getting the evidence they wanted, yet at the same time they were certain of his guilt and this—this contemptible gambit was designed to trick him into confession. "If nothing is known against me—even after a month of eavesdropping," he said steadily, "then why accuse me?"

Tamasi looked at the dentist with interest, the detached and clinical interest of a biologist for a specimen or a philatelist for a rarity. "As the situation stands," he said, "the Security Police—and by that I mean both my subordinates and my superiors—are inclined to think that they have been following a false trail. I do not think so, but that is because I was more persistent than the others. I took the trouble to listen to a selection of your tapes in private and was rewarded by the discovery of a curious coincidence. Please do not worry that I have said anything about it; I have not, nor shall I, whatever comes of this conversation."

"What was the curious coincidence?"

"About one in ten of your patients remarks that he wishes to make an appointment for a relative."

"I should have thought that the proportion was less than that," Bardas said. Apprehension was like an unbearable ache in him, and he was fighting not to let it appear in his demeanour. "Why should they not make appointments for their relatives?"

"No reason. But in each case a name was mentioned. The police hold a very complete register of the inhabitants of the city, and I discovered that the people named do not seem to exist—with a couple of exceptions which could be accounted for by coincidence."

"Many patients come to me from outlying districts."

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Tamasi nodded. "No doubt. But the names mentioned in the surgery never appear in your appointments book, Dr. Bardas. Also the number of people who do visit you considerably exceeds the number of names in the appointments book."

Bardas raised a clenched fist as if to bring it crashing down on the table, then appeared to control himself. "I am sorry," he said thickly. "I am innocent, but you know perfectly well that a visit from a Colonel of the Security Police in dramatic circumstances would unnerve anybody in Budapest. You are building an elaborate structure of suspicion on no grounds at all! Of course I have more visitors than those shown in my appointments register. People frequently come to make appointments and . . . and people in pain come without appointment in the hope that I shall be able to treat them."

"There are six or seven people who come far more frequently than any dental treatment could justify," Tamasi said. "Igor Bata, for example, and Professor Acsel, and Janossy the footballer."

Bardas stared into the face of the policeman, meeting the steady regard of the deep-set eyes without flinching. Again the temptation to confess, to surrender, assailed him. Tamasi knew so much that it seemed hopeless to spend himself in futile denial.

From somewhere he found strength and fought on. "I have friends," he said with dignity. "This is evidence of the kind of tyrannical supervision that was supposed to have died with the AVO after the 1956 revolts. I wish to protest against it; it is a reversion to the useless suspicion and persecution of the Stalinist era and a waste of the State's time and money."

Tamasi chuckled. "You are a clever man and a consummate actor," he said. "I agree that the evidence is thin. The using of nonexistent names, if they are nonexistent, points to a code or system of passwords, but it can be explained away—as, indeed, you have, partially, explained it away. However, I still believe that you are associated with a freedom group, Dr. Bardas, and I am inclined to suspect that you are its leader. You may, if you like, call it intuition, supported by small but, for me, sufficient evidence . . ."

"You are wrong," Bardas said.

Tamasi looked at him directly, shrugged, and pulled himself out of his chair with a movement as fluid and controlled as his handling of the pistol had been. His great height and massive bone structure did not make the man graceless; he was physically formidable.

"For more than a year I have been looking for a responsible

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leader of the freedom movement," he said deliberately. "I have stayed in the Karhatalom because it gave me the best possible chance of finding what I wanted. I am anti-communist, Dr. Bardas, vehemently so . . . with the notorious vehemence of the convert, if you like. I am not a sentimental man and just as I was willing to accept a posting to the Security Police at the time when I believed Communism to be the answer to our problems, I am now willing to fight it from inside when I have decided that it is wrong, immoral, and doomed to eventual failure. During the year I have spoken of, you are the first man at liberty that I have found of whom I have been sure enough to approach. Do I have to point out the possibilities of my offer? I have a high rank in the Security Police and the confidence of the Government. God knows what we might not accomplish together, you and I."

"I am a dentist," Bardas insisted. "If I were a leader of the freedom movement I have no doubt that I should find your propositions interesting, but I tell you again that I am not."

Tamasi took a pencil from his inside breast-pocket and scribbled on the corner of one of the tattered magazines. "This is a private telephone number through which you can reach me," he said. "If you want to continue this conversation leave the message, 'The apples are ready for picking,' and we will arrange something. Please memorise this number and destroy the note of it; I should hate my colleagues to find it in your possession if something disagreeable were to happen."

He picked up the pistol from the table, pushed the clip up into the butt, and slipped the pistol into a shoulder-holster. Bardas was on his feet. Tamasi smiled at him sardonically. "You are in a strong position," he said. "You could easily denounce me and earn great credit for yourself. Do you mean to?"

"I don't think so," Bardas said. "I would not willingly denounce any man to the Security Police. Neither, I think, would ninety-five per cent of the population of Budapest, so please do not start drawing conclusions from my reluctance."

"Continue to be careful of what is said in your surgery," Tamasi advised. "With any luck the transmitter will be taken away the next time the machine is serviced. I shall, when consulted, advise that it is." He grinned. "As I said before, we of the Security Police are nine-tenths convinced that you are a blind alley, so to speak . . . Oh, if the transmitter is removed, you will surely know, because the standards of service you get from the agents will noticeably deteriorate."

Bardas permitted himself a rather wan smile. "Yes," he said. "I expect they will."

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Tamasi held out his hand. Woodenly, without expression, Bardas took it. It was hard and bony and it gripped like a vice. "I understand how this meeting has worried and upset you," Tamasi said. "Had I been in your place I would, I think, have acted as you have done. I repeat, however, that you have nothing to fear. You have only to make a decision, and I shall understand if you wish to take your time about it."

"There is no decision."

Tamasi nodded. "Of course. Good night, Dr. Bardas."

"Good night."

At the door the policeman appeared to be taken by a thought; he stopped and turned.

"You were denounced," he said, "anonymously—by telephone to police headquarters. The switchboard operator put the last part of the call on to a tape— that is the standard procedure in case of anonymous denunciations. The voice was a man's; I should say quite a young man's. Have you any idea who it might have been?"

Bardas slowly shook his head. "No," he said, "but whoever it was he was mistaken." His mind was searching for possibilities, but there did not seem to be any. The idea that one of his companions might have been treacherous was, for him, unbelievable. He was prudent in choosing his associates, but once having chosen he trusted them completely; to have done otherwise would have been an invitation to madness. The fact of the denunciation remained.

Tamasi's dry voice emphasised it.

"If I were you, I should try to find out," he said. "Good night again."

They were seated upon hard chairs in a half-circle, for all the world like some earnest little literary group gathered for a poetry reading. Anton Bardas sat facing them. To one side of the room there was a long mirror with a dancers' barre fixed in front of it, and from where Bardas was sitting a reflection made the group seem twice as large as it really was. In many ways he wished it were twice as large, but for this evening's business, over which he wanted unanimity of agreement, it was already, perhaps, too big.

They were talking. They had indeed been talking for more than an hour—ever since Bardas had told them of Tamasi's visit and proposition.

Sitting on the right of the half-circle, with a small table in front of her on which lay an unused notebook, was Sophie, his personal secretary and receptionist, and also his mistress.

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She was a tall, calm girl of twenty-seven, long-legged and big-breasted. She was candid—so much so that it seemed her main characteristic—yet her candour did not make her aggressive. She had that intelligence which sometimes goes with simplicity, and Bardas loved and relied upon her to an extent that frightened him. The thought of Sophie in the hands of the Security Police was so horrifying to him that he was constantly fighting to keep it from his mind in case it should make a coward of him.

Beside Sophie sat Laszlo Mak, a motor-engineer and, perhaps, his second-in-command, although there was no formal acceptance of it; then Igor Bata, printer and publisher, if only of clandestine news summaries; Rudolph Acsel, who had been a university lecturer in the department of mathematics and, in his hidden life, a radio expert; Franz Janossy, professional footballer; and, lastly, Anna Szepesi, a teacher of dancing and a wisp of a woman made, it always seemed to Bardas, of spring-steel and whalebone. The room they were sitting in was her studio.

They were talking. Laszlo Mak was saying, "We can't trust him! There is no possibility of trusting him! If it's a trick, if he's a double, then we are done for—the lot of us. There are risks that have to be taken, but not this one—not when we don't need to."

Bardas listened and yet did not listen. The talk was no more than a repetition of an inward conversation that had been going on in his head for twenty sleepless hours. He had set aside, as it were, a part of his consciousness with instructions to warn him if any new aspect of the situation was brought up; the rest of him was inert.

Acsel was saying, "Very well, if Laszlo is right and it is impossible to trust the man, then we must act, now, as if he were hostile. We cannot afford to do nothing."

Unanimity—the thought of it came marching into Bardas' mind like a brass band. In a situation of this gravity there had to be unanimity. They were seven people at the core of an organisation of at least ten times their number. The lives, therefore, of nearly a hundred people, the achievements of years of near-miraculous immunity from discovery, the steady growth of experience and cunning, the remarkable fact of their survival during the intoxication of the 1956 revolution, all their hopes and aspirations for the future—all these things were now at hazard.

So the problem *had* to be solved; they *had* to agree upon the solution; they *had* to achieve unanimity.

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"It is all very well to talk about dispersal," Sophie was saying in the clear voice that he loved. "But we know that it is not so easy to fix up. It would mean all of us changing identities, addresses, and jobs. I doubt if we could manage even the identities and addresses—in time—and as for the jobs, they are even more difficult. Don't forget we have livings to earn."

Franz Janossy said, "I think Sophie is right. Dispersal is not the answer." As he spoke he glanced at the girl and his big, handsome face, ordinarily not expressive, softened with the hint of a smile. Bardas watched, saying nothing. The smile on Janossy's face reminded him, however, that Tamasi was not the only problem in his life. Janossy had quite evidently fallen in love with Sophie. It had been coming for some time. The thought of it, to Bardas, was bitter.

"If we cannot trust Tamasi and cannot disperse, what is there left?" Rudolph Acsel asked. "It seems to me that we shall have to run for it. I don't wish to seem cowardly, but what else can we do? It seems pointless, to say the least, to stay here like penguins and wait for the Karhatalom to take us in their own time."

Get out, Bardas thought. Go. Surrender. Run for it into the free world that he knew was not a paradise, but, by comparison, near enough. With Sophie. Oh, God!

"I think Rudolph is right," Janossy was saying. "I don't like the idea of running away, but perhaps we have just got to be logical and sensible."

Bardas was thinking of the motor-coach in Laszlo Mak's garage, with its secret partition behind the luggage compartment. It was the coach used by Franz Janossy's team when they were touring. The frontier guards all knew it, just as they knew Janossy; they were fans, like everybody else in Hungary. It would be easy for them to get out and, dear God, the temptation of it was like thirst on a hot summer's day. It was not as if it were even cowardice, he told himself; even Franz, the most confident and fearless of them all, had just accepted it as a possible necessity . . .

"God knows how many years of hard work and wet trousers," Igor Bata was saying disgustedly. "We're all set up for printing and broadcasting. We could be really valuable when the time comes. Now, because some colonel in the Security Police is maybe—only maybe—trying to plant himself among us, we're all starting to talk about running for it! Well, I say to hell with it! I say we've got to stick it out. We've stuck out worse times and riskier situations."

"Igor is right," Anna Szepesi said. "We are in danger of

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panicking. I shall not hear of getting out until I am quite certain there is no other way."

"Then it'll be too late," Janossy said.

Anna Szepesi shrugged.

Bardas stared at her, then at Janossy, Bata, and Rudolph Acsel. Unanimity, he thought; could they possibly reach it? Ever? On impulse he stood up. Sophie said, "Where are you going, Anton? Is there something the matter?"

He smiled at her and said, "To the lavatory, dear Sophie. If you come to a decision while I am away, hold it—for I cannot hold it any longer." There was laughter, and he walked away across the unpolished floor of the studio thinking how easy it was to buy a moment of false unity with a bad joke. In fact he had no need to go to the lavatory; he merely wanted a few minutes away from their dissension and bewilderment—and from his own. Sophie was much in his mind—and Franz Janossy. The truth of the matter, he suspected, was that they belonged together, the tall fair girl with her splendid body and the handsome, confident young athlete. It was time for the middle-aged dentist to stand aside.

The thought made him wince, and with a sudden bitter determination he told himself that Sophie was his; that Sophie knew it and Janossy knew it; that he needed her and could not, would not do without her.

He had almost reached the door of the studio when he heard Janossy saying, "We could always kill him."

Bardas swung round, suddenly infuriated by the casual confidence in the footballer's voice. "No, Franz!" He spoke loudly, to bridge the distance, and his words carried across the room with the effect of a command, although he had meant them to be a protest. "Don't be foolish," he added. "If Tamasi is lying then his friends know all about us and killing him would have them down on our necks in no time. If he is not lying, then we should be killing a friend. Besides, I don't think you would find Tamasi as easy to kill as you seem to think; the man is supremely dangerous—to somebody."

Anna Szepesi said sternly, "To kill Tamasi would be to panic, just as much as running away."

Bardas went out.

In the hall outside he sat down, staring fixedly at the row of hooks which, had it been daytime, would have been carrying the coats and small possessions of Anna's students. As he sat he tried to control his thoughts, to think of nothing, or of trivial things. Janossy he managed to exorcise from his mind, but Tamasi he could not dismiss.

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Tamasi. His recollection of the man was extraordinarily vivid. Without effort he could see the policeman in his mind's eye, hear the harsh dry voice, see the big hands handling a pistol as if it were as familiar as a knife and fork. Tamasi, he realised, was a man charged with power, energy, and meaning. To walk near him was to have the lightning of his personality strike. Tamasi was a man who dealt in fundamentals, who brought the sequence of cause and effect out into prominence where it could be clearly seen and was not blurred by cross-currents of feeling, hesitations, or doubts. It would, Bardas suddenly realised, be astringently stimulating to work with Tamasi; so much would get done, so little time would be wasted in confusion, so few risks would be taken, and those that were would be taken knowingly.

Presently he admitted to himself that he wanted to trust Tamasi.

Bardas lit a cigarette. To give himself the excuse not to return to the studio he went to the lavatory. As he came out again he was thinking of trust. Beginning at the beginning. What could a man safely trust in himself, he wondered, let alone in others? The standing committee? The intellectual shouting match? The machine that delivers a " yes " and then, unbidden, like a new employee over-eager to please, promptly follows the " yes " with a " no," like a pendulum, like a switchback, like a self-compensating, self-deceiving mechanism for the propagation of indecision?

He had, he realised, been listening to the committee for hours—both committees, one in his head, one in the studio—and was he any better for it, any happier, any more decided? Did Tamasi have an internal committee? If so, and if he were sincere, then how long had his committee taken to make up its mind to change sides? Was it Tamasi's strength that he knew enough not to listen to the committee? Or did Tamasi's committee, unlike his own, unlike Bata's or Janossy's, have a chairman, someone with the power to put a stop to the oscillations and act?

A few minutes later Anton Bardas re-entered the studio and went to take his place in the half-circle. He sat down and said, " I am sorry, but you may stop talking now because I have made up your minds for you."

" What do you mean, Anton? " Laszlo Mak asked.

" I mean that it is useless to consider for ever a problem that has no answer in considering. There is nothing that we know about Colonel Tamasi that cannot be assessed in two ways. On the evidence we have, it is perfectly reasonable to think that he is

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sincere. It is equally reasonable to decide that he is insincere but a good actor. The fact that he seemed to be frank and gave me much invaluable information is beside the point; sincere or insincere, he would have done the same. Agreed?"

He looked round the half-circle of faces. There was doubt in all of them, but no protest.

"So," Bardas said, "the decision has to be made in the dark. I have made it. We shall trust him."

Janossy shouted, "My God! Anton, you must be mad! This man is an AVO. He is one of the power-lovers and torturers!"

"He was, perhaps," Bardas admitted. "I do not think he is now."

"You didn't trust him when you were talking to him," Laszlo Mak pointed out.

"I neither trusted nor mistrusted him. The circumstances filled me with such suspicion and hostility that I was incapable of making a judgment. Just now, in the hall, I went back over our meeting; I remembered not so much what was said as how Tamasi said it, how he held himself, how he behaved."

"And?" Sophie said quietly.

Bardas looked at her with gratitude. She knew. She knew what he meant.

"And," Bardas said, "I suddenly knew—I knew that we could trust him. I think, perhaps, one day, I shall love him, although it will be like loving a tiger. Tamasi is all right. Better than that, he is what we have been waiting for; he is a leader."

"We have a leader," Anna Szepesi said.

"Not of Tamasi's kind," Bardas said. "By comparison I am a cart-horse. I rang the number he gave me."

"Without consulting us!" Janossy said.

"Yes, Franz, without consulting you. The business of a leader is to lead, even if he is a cart-horse. I gave the message and was asked to meet him. I shall go."

Janossy said, "I'm coming with you."

"Why?"

"To cover you."

Bardas frowned. He would have preferred to go alone. He realised that Janossy's pride was bruised and that he was suspicious and unconvinced. Nothing had been said about his going alone. He shrugged and nodded, saying mildly, "All right, Franz, if you wish."

Sophie said, "Anton, it is so dangerous. You . . ."

Bardas shook his head. "No, Sophie, it is not in the least

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dangerous—not yet. Even if Tamasi is a double, the trap will not be sprung until they know a great deal more about us. But I am sure he is not a double. I feel it. My heart and my head are in complete accord about it." He grinned. "My stomach, on the other hand, is disgusted by all this strain and emotion . . . Have you my pills?"

The path through the park on the Gellert Hill mounted in a curve round the hillside. It was a moonlit night and, below, the great Danube was silver and sometimes silver-gilt as it flowed between the lights of the twin cities. Along every few yards of the path benches were placed, giving a view of the river and the Liberation Monument. Tamasi had said that he would be sitting on the last and highest of them—or waiting in the vicinity if it chanced to be occupied. That it would be occupied was highly unlikely, because it was too late at night and too chill on the exposed slope, even for lovers.

Bardas walked slowly, filling his lungs with the keen cleanliness of the night air. He was at peace with himself.

He had agreed with Franz Janossy that the footballer should follow him at a distance of about thirty yards; enough, if there was trouble, to give him a choice of staying out of it or of making a surprise appearance. In fact, Bardas was confident that the chances of trouble were nil.

He was nearing the top of the hill. Presently, silhouetted against the night sky, he was able to see the head and shoulders of a tall man sitting facing him on the topmost of the benches. Tamasi. He felt excitement rise in him at the thought of a second meeting with the man; a very different meeting, for this time he was committed, and compromised.

He came up to the bench, still walking slowly but making no attempt at stealth. He could feel Tamasi's gaze upon him and was struck by the policeman's immobility; it was characteristic of him that he was either relaxed or fully committed to action, and that his actions were always purposive.

"Good evening," Bardas said.

"Good evening," Tamasi responded. "It is very good to see you."

Bardas sat down. He took out cigarettes and offered one to Tamasi, who accepted. By the light of Tamasi's cigarette-lighter each man saw the other's face. Tamasi smiled. "I have passed a nervous few hours," he said. "I expect you have done the same."

"Yes," Bardas admitted with a chuckle. "Never again, if I can help it."

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Tamasi laughed. They were at ease with one another. Then Tamasi stiffened. It was a movement so slight as to be almost unnoticeable, but once noticed was full of meaning. "There is somebody coming up the path," he said. "Unusual, for this time of night."

"It is my cover," Bardas said. "I did not want him to come, but my friends insisted. It is Janossy."

"A very good football player."

"A very good freedom fighter. Fearless and confident—perhaps a little too confident."

Janossy was almost level with them. Bardas watched him; he had insisted that Janossy should not join them but go past and find a place in which to stay on watch. When the footballer was no more than a few feet away, he said, "Everything is all right, Franz."

Janossy turned suddenly. His arm came up. Moonlight glinted on the barrel of a pistol. The muzzle of the pistol flamed and what seemed to be an iron hammer struck Bardas high on the left breast, driving him hard back against the wood of the park bench. He felt Tamasi move convulsively, a jet, an explosion of movement. Two shots rang out. They split the silence of the night almost as a single sound, so close were they together.

Bardas saw Janossy drop; he crumpled with the suddenness and finality of a marionette whose strings have been released. On the hard gravel of the path he twitched convulsively once and lay quite still.

Bardas' arm and shoulder were totally numbed. He fought for composure and the power to think, putting down shock and panic. Tamasi was half lying, half crouching beside the bench, his Walther pistol held in his extended hand. As Bardas turned his head to look down at him, the policeman moved. At one moment he was crouching and at the next erect and moving towards Janossy. Bardas watched him bend over the footballer for an instant. Then Tamasi turned, the pistol in his hand trained upon Bardas. "Did you know?" His voice grated.

Bardas shook his head. He licked his lips and said, "No. You must believe! I did not know."

"What is the matter? Are you hit?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the chest. High up, almost in the shoulder." Bardas tried to move his left arm. It would not obey him. "Janossy?" he whispered.

"He is dead."

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"Are you all right?"

"Yes, he missed me."

"I don't understand," Bardas said. "I don't understand."

"We must get away from here." Tamasi's voice was urgent. "The shots must have attracted attention. Can you walk?"

"Yes."

"Use your handkerchief," Tamasi said. "Press it hard over the wound. I have a car at the foot of the hill. Do you know of a doctor who will treat you without talking?"

"Yes," Bardas said. The first stirrings of life were coming back to his numbed arm and with them, pain. A burning ache gnawed at his chest and shoulder. He coughed and felt the taste of blood in his mouth.

"Come," Tamasi said. "It is not far. Put your good arm round my neck. We must go, and the sooner the better."

In Sophie's apartment, in bed, with his chest a mass of surgical tape and with the gentle euphoria of morphine making the world seem a place of no complications and only limited importance, Bardas looked up at Sophie and Tamasi, standing one on either side of the bed.

"Do you think it could have been Franz who denounced us?" Sophie was asking.

Bardas said, "It must have been. There is no other explanation. If Tamasi can get us a copy of the tape, we shall know for certain."

"Do you know why?" she asked.

Bardas looked at her, wanting to spare her. "I can only guess," he said, "but I am afraid my guess is correct . . . He wanted you, my dear—very much—enough to betray me to get you. Things turned out differently from what he had planned; he hoped that I would be arrested—that and no more. Tonight was a desperate improvisation, forced upon him by circumstance. I think he meant to kill both Tamasi and me, and to come back with the story that Tamasi had killed me and he had killed Tamasi . . ."

"The fool!" Sophie said. "His arrogance was unbelievable. It did not enter his mind that a woman could resist him. He could never have had me—never, never, never!"

"Poor Franz," Bardas said. "What a mad and futile thing to have done . . . What are the implications?"

Tamasi shrugged. "There will be a great sensation, inevitably. Franz Janossy murdered! However, I cannot see how it can be connected with us. I took his gun before we left. The Security Police have no knowledge of his association with you. We shall

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see. When I get to the office tomorrow I shall find out more and take steps to cover us if necessary."

Bardas chuckled. "It is like having a doctor in the house when there is sickness in the family," he said.

Tamasi nodded, smiling. "Now you must sleep," he said. "The bullet is out and you have a fine nurse and there is no reason for anxiety. You were lucky."

Sophie knelt by the bed and laid her head on Bardas' lap. He ran his fingers sensuously through her hair, feeling the softness and fineness of it. "We shall do great things together," he said to Tamasi. "Good night, my friend, and thank you."

The policeman smiled again, nodded and went out.

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LEISURE PLEASURE

Strictly for fun, another rhyming quiz. Each clue leads to two words, each of two syllables, which rhyme in both their syllables. i.e. "Mention pension" qualifies, but not "Mention truncheon."

A few of the clues are slightly contrived, but still recognisable. An example of clue and answer:

Gosh! the nymph—Crikey! Psyche

1. *Silly matchmaker*
2. *Red vassal*
3. *Less dry mollusc*
4. *Swift yellow bird*
5. *Potato wagon*
6. *Smaller drink*
7. *Huge hat*
8. *Limp cat*
9. *Dandy gunner*
10. *Burns joints*
11. *Little ghost*
12. *Gay sound*
13. *Spill*
14. *Horse stealin'*
15. *Mighty plug*
16. *Thin dawdler*
17. *Not a bikini wearer*
18. *Tinny piano*
19. *Outlines dogs*
20. *Eerie parson*
21. *Hobble quadruped*
22. *Flat fall*
23. *Unpretentious bee*
24. *Rugged rider*
25. *Knock-kneed ass*
26. *Luscious lucre*
27. *Bacon magnate*
28. *Mother waxwork*
29. *Friendly Jeeves*
30. *Uncle Sam's kerchief*

Answers next month

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Ape about the House

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

GRANNY thought it a perfectly horrible idea; but then she could remember the days when there were *human* servants.

"If you imagine," she snorted, "that I'll share the house with a monkey, you're very much mistaken."

"Don't be so old-fashioned," I answered. "Anyway, Dorcas isn't a monkey."

"Then what is she—it?"

I flipped through the pages of the Biological Engineering Corporation's guide. "Listen to this, Gran," I said. "'The Superchimp (Registered Trademark) *Pan Sapiens* is an intelligent anthropoid, derived by selective breeding and genetic modification from basic chimpanzee stock—'"

"Just what I said! A monkey!"

"'—and with a large enough vocabulary to understand simple orders. It can be trained to perform all types of domestic work or routine manual labour and is docile, affectionate, housebroken and particularly good with children.'"

"Children! Would you trust Johnnie and Susan with a—a gorilla?"

I put the handbook down with a sigh.

"You've got a point there. Dorcas is expensive, and if I find the little monsters knocking her about. . . ."

At this moment, fortunately, the door buzzer sounded.

"Sign, please," said the delivery man.

I signed, and Dorcas entered our lives.

"Hullo, Dorcas," I said. "I hope you'll be happy here."

Her big mournful eyes peered out at me from beneath their heavy ridges. I'd met much uglier humans, though she was rather an odd shape, being only about four feet tall and very nearly as wide. In her neat, plain uniform she looked just like a

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She was conscientious and didn't answer back

maid from one of those early films; her feet, however, were bare and covered an astonishing amount of floor space.

"Morning, ma'am," she answered, in slurred but perfectly intelligible accents.

"She can speak," squawked Granny.

"Of course," I answered. "She can pronounce over fifty words, and can understand two hundred. She'll learn more as she grows used to us, but for the moment we must stick to the vocabulary on pages 42 and 43 of the handbook." I passed the instruction manual over to Granny; for once, she couldn't find even a single word to express her feelings.

Dorcas settled down very quickly. Her basic training—Class A Domestic, plus Nursery Duties—had been excellent, and by the end of the first month there were very few jobs around the house that she couldn't do, from laying the table to changing the children's clothes. At first she had an annoying habit of picking up things with her feet; it seemed as natural to her as using her hands, and it took a long time to break her of it. One of Granny's cigarette butts finally did the trick.

She was goodnatured, conscientious, and didn't answer back. She had an interest in clothes, and was fascinated by colours. If I'd let her dress the way she wanted, she'd have looked like a rainbow.

The children, I was relieved to find, adored her. I know what people say about Johnnie and Sue, and admit that it contains some truth. It's so hard to bring up children when their father's away most of the time, and to make matters worse Granny spoils them when I'm not looking. So indeed does Eric, whenever

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his ship's on Earth, and I'm left to cope with the resulting tantrums. *Never marry a spaceman* if you can possibly avoid it; the pay may be good, but the glamour soon wears off.

By the time Eric was back from the Venus run with three weeks' accumulated leave, our new maid had settled down as one of the family. Eric took her in his stride; after all, he had met much odder creatures on the planets. He grumbled about the expense, of course, but I pointed out that with so much of the housework taken off my hands, we should be able to spend more time together and do some of the visiting that had proved impossible in the past. I looked forward to having a little social life again.

For there was plenty of social life at Port Goddard, even though we were stuck in the middle of the Pacific. There was a constant flow of distinguished visitors and travellers from all parts of the Earth—not to mention remoter points.

Every community has its arbiter of fashion and culture, its grande dame who is resented yet copied by all her unsuccessful rivals. At Port Goddard it was Christine Swanson; her husband was Commodore of the Space Service, and she never let us forget it.

Whenever a liner touched down, she would invite all the officers on Base to a reception at her stylishly antique nineteenth century mansion. It was advisable to go, unless you had a very good excuse, even though that meant looking at Christine's paintings. She fancied herself as an artist, and the walls were hung with multicoloured daubs. Thinking of polite remarks to make about them was one of the major hazards of Christine's parties; another was her yard-long cigarette holder.

There was a new batch of paintings since Eric had been away: Christine had entered her squarevoid period. "You see, my dears," she explained to us, "the old-fashioned oblong pictures are terribly dated—they just don't go with the Space Age. There's no such thing as Up or Down, Horizontal or Vertical out there, so no really modern picture should have one side longer than another. And ideally, it should look exactly the same whichever way you hang it—I'm working on that right now."

"That seems very logical," said Eric tactfully. After all, the Commodore was his boss. But when our hostess was out of earshot he added, "I don't know if Christine's pictures are hung the right way up, but I'm sure they're hung the wrong side to the wall."

I agreed; before I got married I spent several years at the Art School and considered I knew something about the subject. Given as much cheek as Christine I could have made quite a hit

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with my own canvases, which were now gathering dust in the garage.

"You know, Eric," I said a little cattily, "I could teach Dorcas to paint better than this."

He laughed and answered, "It might be fun to try it some day, if Christine gets out of hand." Then I forgot all about the matter —until a month later, when Eric was back in space.

The exact cause of the fight isn't important; it arose over a community development scheme where Christine and I took opposing viewpoints. She won, as usual, and I left the meeting breathing fire and brimstone. When I got home, the first thing I saw was Dorcas, looking at the colour pictures in one of the weeklies—and I remembered Eric's words.

I put down my handbag, shook off my coat, and said firmly, "Dorcas—come out to the garage."

It took some time to dig out my oils and easel from under the pile of discarded toys, old Christmas decorations, skin-diving gear, empty packing cases and broken tools. It seemed that Eric never had time to tidy up before he shot off into space again. There were several unfinished canvases buried among the debris, which would do for a start.

I set up a landscape which had got as far as one skinny tree, and said, "Now, Dorcas—I'm going to teach you to paint."

My plan was simple and not altogether honest. Although apes had, of course, splashed paint on canvas often enough in the past, none of them had created a genuine, properly composed work of art. I was sure that Dorcas couldn't either, but no one need know that mine was the guiding hand. She could get all the credit.

I was not actually going to lie to anyone, however: though I would create the design, mix the pigments, and do most of the execution, I would let Dorcas tackle just as much of the work as she could handle. I hoped that she could fill in the areas of solid colour, and perhaps develop a characteristic style of brushwork in the process.

With any luck, I estimated, she might be able to do perhaps a quarter of the actual work. Then I could claim it was all hers with a reasonably clear conscience—for hadn't Michelangelo and Leonardo signed paintings that were largely done by their assistants? I'd be Dorcas' assistant.

Dorcas quickly got the general idea, and soon understood the use of brush and palette, but her execution was very clumsy. She seemed unable to make up her mind which hand to use, and kept transferring the brush from one to the other. In the end I had

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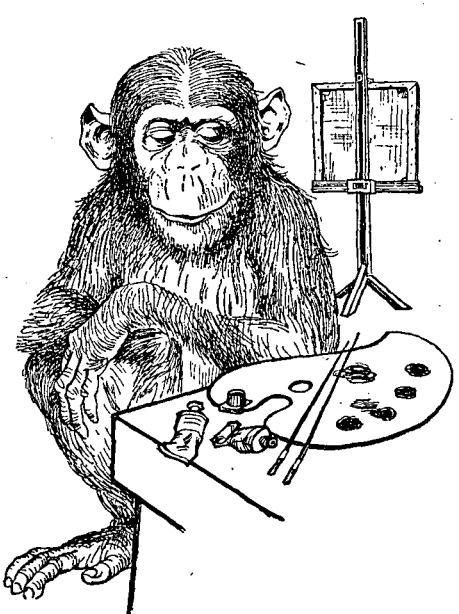
to do almost all the work, and she merely contributed a few dabs of paint.

Still, I could hardly expect her to become a master in a couple of lessons, and really it was of no importance. If Dorcas was an artistic flop, I would just have to stretch the truth a little farther when I claimed that it was all her own work.

I was in no hurry; this was not the sort of thing that could be rushed. At the end of a couple of months, the School of Dorcas had produced a dozen paintings, all of them on carefully chosen themes that would be familiar to a Superchimp at Port Goddard. There was a study of the lagoon, a view of our house, an impression of a night launching—all glare and explosions of light, a fishing scene, a palm grove . . . clichés, of course, but anything else would arouse suspicion. Before she came to us, I don't suppose Dorcas had seen much of the world outside the labs where she had been reared and trained.

The best of these paintings—some of them were good; after all, I should know—were hung around the house in places where my friends could hardly fail to notice them.

Everything worked perfectly; admiring queries were followed by astonished cries when I modestly disclaimed responsibility. Scepticism was soon demolished by my letting a few privileged friends see Dorcas at work. I chose the viewers for their ignorance of art, and the picture was an abstract in red, gold, and black which no one dared to criticise. By this time, Dorcas could fake it quite well, like a movie actor pretending to play a musical instrument.



Just to spread the news around, I gave away some of the best paintings, pretending that I considered them no more than amusing novelties—yet at the

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same time giving just the barest hint of jealousy. "I've hired Dorcas," I said testily, "to work for me, not for the Museum of Modern Art." And I was very careful not to draw any comparison between her paintings and those of Christine: our mutual friends could be relied upon to do that.

When Christine came to see me, ostensibly to discuss our quarrel "like two sensible people," I knew that she was on the run. So I capitulated gracefully as we took tea in the drawing-room, beneath one of Dorcas' most impressive productions: *Full Moon rising over the Lagoon*, very cold, blue and mysterious. I was really quite proud of it. There was not a word about the picture, or about Dorcas, but Christine's eyes told me all I wanted to know.

The next week, an exhibition she had been planning was quietly dropped.

Gamblers say that you should quit when you're ahead of the game. If I had stopped to think, I should have known that Christine would not let the matter rest there. Sooner or later, she was bound to counter-attack.

She chose her time well, waiting until the kids were at school, Granny was away visiting, and I was at the shopping centre on the other side of the island. Probably she telephoned first to check that no one was at home—no one human, that is. We had told Dorcas not to answer calls; when she had done so in the early days, it had not been a success. A Superchimp on the phone sounds exactly like a drunk, and this can lead to all sorts of complications.

Christine must have driven up to the house, expressed acute disappointment at my absence, and invited herself in. She would have wasted no time in getting to work on Dorcas, but luckily I had taken the precaution of briefing my anthropoid colleague. "Dorcas make," I had said over and over again, each time one of our productions was finished. "Not Missus make—Dorcas make."

And in the end, I'm sure she believed this herself.

If my brain-washing, and the limitations of a fifty-word vocabulary, baffled Christine, she did not stay baffled for long. She was a lady of direct action, and Dorcas was a docile and obedient soul. Christine, determined to expose fraud and collusion, must have been gratified by the promptness with which she was led into the garage studio; she must also have been just a little surprised.

I arrived home about half an hour later, and knew that there was trouble afoot as soon as I saw Christine's car parked at the

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kerb. I could only hope I was in time, but as soon as I stepped into the uncannily silent house I realised that it was too late. *Something* had happened; Christine would surely be talking, even if she had only an ape as audience. To her, any silence was as great a challenge as a blank canvas; it had to be filled with the sound of her own voice.

The house was utterly still; there was no sign of life. With a sense of mounting apprehension, I tiptoed through the drawing-room, the dining-room, the kitchen, and out into the back. The garage door was open, and I peered cautiously through.

It was a bitter moment of truth. Finally freed from my influence, Dorcas had at last developed a style of her own. She was swiftly and confidently painting—but not in the way I had so carefully taught her. And as for her subject . . .

I was deeply hurt when I saw the caricature that was giving Christine such obvious enjoyment. After all that I had done for Dorcas, this seemed sheer ingratitude. Of course, I know now that no malice was involved, and that she was merely expressing herself. The psychologists, and the critics, who wrote those absurd programme notes for her London exhibition at the Tate, say that her portraits cast a vivid light on man-animal relationships, and allow us to look for the first time at the human race from outside. But I did not see it that way when I ordered Dorcas back into the kitchen.

For the subject was not the only thing that upset me: what really rankled was the thought of all the time I had wasted improving her technique—and her manners. She was ignoring everything I had ever told her, as she sat in front of the easel with her arms folded motionless on her chest.

Even then, at the very beginning of her career as an independent artist, it was painfully obvious to me that Dorcas had more talent in her swiftly-moving feet than I had in my hands.

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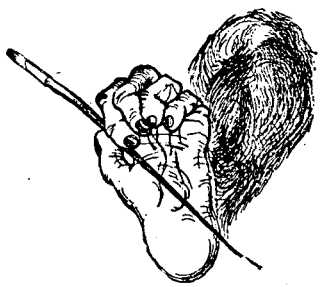

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When The Forsyte Saga was published in one volume in 1922, Galsworthy became a public figure, a best-seller in Britain and U.S.A. "I take off my hat to him," wrote Siegfried Sassoon, "the Forsyte family is becoming part of the national consciousness." Novelist, dramatist, Nobel prizewinner, writer of brilliant short stories— Argosy's reprint shows Galsworthy at his best. The Juryman is as evocative today as when he wrote it. A new biography, The Man of Principle, by Dudley Barker, is just out.

THE JURYMAN

BY JOHN GALSWORTHY

"Don't you see, brother, I was reading yesterday the Gospel about Christ, the little Father; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?"

"Indeed, I have," replied Stepanuitch; "but we are people in darkness; we can't read."—TOLSTOY.

MR. HENRY BOSENGATE, of the London Stock Exchange, seated himself in his car that morning during the Great War with a sense of injury. Major in a Volunteer Corps; member of all the local committees; lending this very car to the neighbouring hospital, at times even driving it himself for their benefit; subscribing to funds, so far as his diminished income permitted—he was conscious of being an asset to the country, and one whose time could not be wasted with impunity. To be summoned to sit on a jury at the local assizes, and not even the grand jury at that! It was in the nature of an outrage.

Strong and upright, with hazel eyes and dark eyebrows, pinkish-brown cheeks, a forehead white, well shaped, and getting high, with greyish hair glossy and well brushed, and a trim moustache, he might have been taken for that colonel of Volunteers which indeed he was in a fair way of becoming.

His wife had followed him out under the porch, and stood bracing her supple body clothed in lilac linen. Red rambler roses formed a sort of crown on her dark head; her ivory-coloured face had in it just a suggestion of the Japanese.

Mr. Bosengate spoke through the whirr of the engine.

"I don't expect to be late, dear. This business is ridiculous. There oughtn't to *be* any crime in these days."

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His wife—her name was Kathleen—smiled. She looked very pretty and cool, Mr. Bosengate thought. To one bound on this dull and stuffy business everything he owned seemed pleasant—the geranium beds beside the gravel drive, his long, red brick house mellowing decorously in its creepers and ivy, the little clock-tower over stables now converted into a garage, the dovecote, masking at the other end the conservatory which adjoined the billiard-room. Close to the red-brick lodge his two children, Kate and Harry, ran out from under the acacia trees, and waved to him, scrambling barelegged on to the low, red, ivy-covered wall which guarded his domain of eleven acres. Mr. Bosengate waved back, thinking, Jolly couple—by Jove, they are! Above their heads, through the trees, he could see right away to some Downs, faint in the July heat haze. And he thought, Pretty a spot as one could have got, so close to town!

Despite the war he had enjoyed these last two years more than any of the ten since he built Charmleigh and settled down to semi-rural domesticity with his young wife. There had been a certain piquancy, a savour added to existence, by the country's peril, and all the public service and sacrifice it demanded. His chauffeur was gone, and one gardener did the work of three. He enjoyed—positively enjoyed—his committee work; even the serious decline of business and increase of taxation had not much worried one continually conscious of the national crisis and his own part therein. The country had wanted waking up, wanted a lesson in effort and economy; and the feeling that he had not spared himself in these strenuous times had given a zest to those quiet pleasures of bed and board which, at his age, even the most patriotic could retain with a good conscience. He had denied himself many things—new clothes, presents for Kathleen and the children, travel, and that pineapple house which he had been on the point of building when the war broke out; new wine, too, and cigars, and membership of the two clubs which he had never used in the old days. The hours had seemed fuller and longer, sleep better earned—wonderful, the things one could do without when put to it!

He turned the car into the highroad, driving dreamily, for he was in plenty of time. The war was going pretty well now; he was no fool optimist, but now that conscription was in force, one might reasonably hope for its end within a year. Then there would be a boom, and one might let oneself go a little. Visions of theatres and supper with his wife at the Savoy afterwards, and cosy night drives back into the sweet-smelling country behind your own chauffeur once more teased a fancy which even now did not soar beyond the confines of domestic pleasures.

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He pictured his wife in new dresses by Jay—she was fifteen years younger than himself, and " paid for dressing " as they said. He had always delighted—as men older than their wives will—in the admiration she excited from others not privileged to enjoy her charms. Her rather queer and ironical beauty, her cool irreproachable wifeliness, was a constant balm to him. They would give dinner parties again, have their friends down from town, and he would once more enjoy sitting at the foot of the dinner table while Kathleen sat at the head, with the light soft on her ivory shoulders, behind flowers she had arranged in that original ways of hers, and fruit which he had grown in his hot-houses; once more he would take legitimate interest in the wine he offered to his guests—once more stock that Chinese cabinet wherein he kept cigars. Yes—there was a certain satisfaction in these days of privation, if only from the anticipation they created.

The sprinkling of villas had become continuous on either side of the highroad; and women going out to shop, tradesmen's boys delivering victuals, young men in khaki, began to abound. Now and then a limping or bandaged form would pass—some bit of human wreckage! and Mr. Bosengate would think mechanically, Another of those poor devils! Wonder if we've had his case before us.

Running his car into the best hotel garage of the little town, he made his way leisurely over to the court. It stood back from the market-place, and was already lapped by a sea of persons having, as in the outer ring at race meetings, an air of business at which one must not be caught out, together with a soaked or flushed appearance. Mr. Bosengate could not resist putting his handerchief to his nose. He had carefully drenched it with lavender water, and to this fact owed, perhaps, his immunity from the post of foreman on the jury—for, say what you will about the English, they have a deep instinct for affairs.

He found himself second in the front row of the jury box, and through the odour of disinfectant gazed at the Judge's face, expressionless up there, for all the world like a bewigged bust. His fellows in the box had that appearance of falling between two classes characteristic of jurymen. Mr. Bosengate was not impressed. On one side of him the foreman sat, a prominent upholsterer, known in the town as Gentleman Fox. His dark and beautifully brushed and oiled hair and moustache, his radiant linen, gold watch and chain, the white piping to his waistcoat, and a habit of never saying " Sir " had long marked him out from commoner men; he undertook to bury people too, to save them trouble; and was altogether superior. On the other

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side Mr. Bosengate had one of those men who, except when they sit on juries, are never seen without a little brown bag, and the appearance of having been interrupted in a drink. Pale and shiny, with large loose eyes shifting from side to side, he had an underdone voice and uneasy, flabby hands. Mr. Bosengate disliked sitting next to him. Beyond this commercial traveller sat a dark pale young man with spectacles; beyond him again, a short old man with grey moustache, mutton chops, and innumerable wrinkles; and the front row was completed by a chemist. The three immediately behind, Mr. Bosengate did not thoroughly master; but the three at the end of the second row he learnt in their order of an oldish man in a grey suit, given to winking; an inanimate person with the mouth of a moustachioed codfish, over whose long bald crown three wisps of damp hair were carefully arranged; and a dried, dapperish, clean-shorn man, whose mouth seemed terrified lest it should be surprised without a smile.

Their first and second verdicts were recorded without the necessity for withdrawal, and Mr. Bosengate was already sleepy when the third case was called. The sight of khaki revived his drooping attention. But what a weedy-looking specimen! This prisoner had a truly nerveless, pitiable, dejected air. If he had ever had a military bearing it had shrunk into him during his confinement. His ill-shaped brown tunic, whose little brass buttons seemed trying to keep smiling, struck Mr. Bosengate as ridiculously short, used though he was to such things. Absurd, he thought—Lumbago! Just where they ought to be covered! Then the officer and gentleman stirred in him, and he added to himself, Still, there must be some distinction made! The little soldier's visage had once perhaps been tanned, but was now the colour of dark dough; his large brown eyes with white showing below the iris, as so often in the eyes of very nervous people—wandered from face to face, of Judge, counsel, jury, and public. There were hollows in his cheeks, his dark hair looked damp; around his neck he wore a bandage.

The commercial traveller on Mr. Bosengate's left turned, and whispered, "Felo de se! My hat, what a guy!"

Mr. Bosengate pretended not to hear—he could not bear that fellow!—and slowly wrote on a bit of paper, *Owen Lewis*. Welsh! Well, he looked it—not at all an English face. Attempted suicide—not at all an English crime! Suicide implied surrender, a putting-up of hands to Fate—to say nothing of the religious aspect of the matter. And suicide in khaki seemed to Mr. Bosengate particularly abhorrent; like turning tail in face of the enemy; almost meriting the fate of a deserter. He looked at the

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prisoner, trying not to give way to this prejudice. And the prisoner seemed to look at him, though this, perhaps, was fancy.

The counsel for the prosecution, a little, alert, grey, decided man, above military age, began detailing the circumstances of the crime. Mr. Bosengate, though not particularly sensitive to atmosphere, could perceive a sort of current running through the court. It was as if jury and public were thinking rhythmically in obedience to the same unexpressed prejudice of which he himself was conscious. Even the Caesar-like pale face up there, presiding, seemed in its ironic serenity responding to that current.

"Gentlemen of the jury, before I call my evidence, I direct your attention to the bandage the accused is still wearing. He gave himself this wound with his Army razor, adding, if I may say so, insult to the injury he was inflicting on his country. He pleads not guilty; and before the magistrates he said that absence from his wife was preying on his mind." The advocate's close lips widened. "Well, gentlemen, if such an excuse is to weigh with us in these days, I'm sure I don't know what's to happen to the Empire."

No, by George! thought Mr. Bosengate.

The evidence of the first witness, a room-mate who had caught the prisoner's hand, and of the sergeant, who had at once been summoned, was conclusive, and he began to cherish a hope that they would get through without withdrawing, and he would be home before five. But then a hitch occurred. The regimental doctor failed to respond when his name was called; and the Judge, having for the first time that day showed himself capable of human emotion, intimated that he would adjourn until the morrow.

Mr. Bosengate received the announcement with equanimity. He would be home even earlier! And gathering up the sheets of paper he had scribbled on, he put them in his pocket and got up. The would-be suicide was being taken out of the court—a shambling drab figure with shoulders hunched. What good were men like that in these days! What good! The prisoner looked up. Mr. Bosengate encountered in full the gaze of those large brown eyes, with the white showing underneath. What a suffering, wretched, pitiful face! A man had no business to give you a look like that! The prisoner passed on down the stairs, and vanished.

Mr. Bosengate went out and across the market-place to the garage of the hotel where he had left his car. The sun shone fiercely and he thought, I must do some watering in the garden.

He brought the car out, and was about to start the engine,

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when someone passing said, "Good evenin'. Seedy-lookin' beggar that last prisoner, ain't he? We don't want men of that stamp." It was his neighbour on the jury, the commercial traveller, in a straw hat, with a little brown bag already in his hand and the froth of an interrupted drink on his moustache.

Answering curtly, "Good evening!" and thinking, Nor of yours, my friend! Mr. Bosengate started the car with unnecessary clamour. But as if brought back to life by the commercial traveller's remark, the prisoner's figure seemed to speed along too, turning up at Mr. Bosengate his pitifully unhappy eyes. Want of his wife!—queer excuse that for trying to put it out of his power ever to see her again. Why! Half a loaf, even a slice, was better than no bread. Not many of that neurotic type in the Army—thank Heaven!

The lugubrious figure vanished, and Mr. Bosengate pictured instead the form of his own wife bending over her Gloire de Dijon roses in the rosary, where she generally worked a little before tea now that they were short of gardeners. He saw her, as often he had seen her, raise herself and stand, head to one side, a gloved hand on her slender hip, gazing as it were ironically from under drooped lids at buds which did not come out fast enough. And the word caline, for he was something of a French scholar, shot through his mind: Kathleen—caline! If he found her there when he got in, he would steal up on the grass and—ah! but with great care not to crease her dress or disturb her hair. If only she weren't quite so self-contained, he thought. It's like a cat you can't get near, not really near!

The car, returning faster than it had come down that morning, had already passed the outskirt villas, and was breasting the hill to where, among fields and the old trees, Charmleigh lay apart from commoner life. Turning into his drive, Mr. Bosengate thought with a certain surprise, I wonder what she *does* think of! I wonder! He put his gloves and hat down in the outer hall and went into the lavatory, to dip his face in cool water and wash it with sweet-smelling soap—delicious revenge on the unclean atmosphere in which he had been stewing so many hours. He came out again into the hall dazed by soap and the mellowed light, and a voice from halfway up the stairs said, "Daddy! Look!" His little daughter was standing up there with one hand on the banisters. She scrambled on to them and came sliding down, her frock up to her eyes, and her holland knickers to her middle.

Mr. Bosengate said mildly, "Well, that's elegant!"

"Tea's in the summer-house. Mummy's waiting. Come on!"

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With her hand in his, Mr. Bosengate went on, through the drawing-room, long and cool, with sunblinds down, through the billiard-room, high and cool, through the conservatory, green and sweet-smelling, out on to the terrace and the upper lawn. He had never felt such sheer exhilarated joy in his home surroundings, so cool, glistening, and green under the July sun; and he said, "Well, Kit, what have you all been doing?"

"I've fed my rabbits and Harry's; and we've been in the attic; Harry got his leg through the skylight."

Mr. Bosengate drew in his breath with a hiss.

"It's all right, Daddy; we got it out again, it's only grazed the skin. And we've been making swabs—I made seventeen—Mummy made thirty-three, and then she went to the hospital. Did you put many men in prison?"

Mr. Bosengate cleared his throat. The question seemed to him untimely.

"Only two."

"What's it like in prison, Daddy?"

Mr. Bosengate, who had no more knowledge than his little daughter, replied in an absent voice, "Not very nice."

They were passing under a young oak tree, where the path wound round to the rosary and summer-house. Something shot down and clawed Mr. Bosengate's neck. His little daughter began to hop and suffocate with laughter.

"Oh, Daddy! Aren't you caught! I led you on purpose!"

Looking up, Mr. Bosengate saw his small son lying along a low branch above him—like the leopard he was declaring himself to be (for fear of error), and thought blithely, What an active little chap it is!

"Let me drop on your shoulders, Daddy—like they do on the deer."

"Oh yes! Do be a deer, Daddy!"

Mr. Bosengate did not see being a deer; his hair had just been brushed. But he entered the rosary buoyantly between his offspring. His wife was standing precisely as he had imagined her, in a pale blue frock open at the neck, with a narrow black band round the waist, and little accordion pleats below. She looked her coolest. Her smile, when she turned her head, hardly seemed to take Mr. Bosengate seriously enough. He placed his lips below one of her half-drooped eyelids. She even smelled of roses. His children began to dance round their mother, and Mr. Bosengate, firmly held between them, was also compelled to do this, until she said, "When you've quite done, let's have tea!"

It was not the greeting he had imagined coming along in the

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car. Earwigs were plentiful in the summer-house—used perhaps twice a year, but indispensable to every country residence—and Mr. Bosengate was not sorry for the excuse to get out again. Though all was so pleasant, he felt oddly restless, rather suffocated; and lighting his pipe, began to move about among the roses, blowing tobacco at the greenfly; in wartime one was never quite idle! And suddenly he said, "We're trying a wretched Tommy at the assizes."

His wife looked up from a rose.

"What for?"

"Attempted suicide."

"Why did he?"

"Can't stand the separation from his wife."

She looked at him, gave a low laugh, and said, "Oh dear!"

Mr. Bosengate was puzzled. Why did she laugh? He looked round, saw the children were gone, took his pipe from his mouth, and approached her.

"You look very pretty," he said. "Give me a kiss."

His wife bent her body forward from the waist, and pushed her lips out till they touched his moustache. Mr. Bosengate felt a sensation as if he had arisen from breakfast without having eaten marmalade. He mastered it and said, "That jury are a rum lot."

His wife's eyelids flickered. "I wish women sat on juries."

"Why?"

"It would be an experience."

Not the first time she had used that curious expression! Yet her life was far from dull, so far as he could see; with the new interests created by the war, and the constant calls on her time made by the perfection of their home life, she had a useful and busy existence. Again the random thought passed through him, But she never tells me anything! And suddenly that lugubrious khaki-clad figure started up among the rose bushes. "We've got a lot to be thankful for!" he said abruptly. "I must go to work!"

His wife, raising one eyebrow, smiled. "And I to weep!" Mr. Bosengate laughed—she had a pretty wit! And stroking his comely moustache where it had been kissed, he moved out into the sunshine.

All the evening, throughout his labours, not inconsiderable, for this jury business had put him behind time, he was afflicted by that restless pleasure in his surroundings; would break off in mowing the lower lawn to look at the house through the trees; would leave his study and committee papers to cross into the drawing-room and sniff its dainty fragrance; paid a special good-night visit to the children having supper in the schoolroom;

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pottered in and out from his dressing-room to admire his wife while she was changing for dinner; dined with his mind perpetually on the next course; talked volubly of the war; and in the billiard-room afterwards, smoking the pipe which had taken the place of his cigar, could not keep still, but roamed about, now in conservatory, now in drawing-room, where his wife and the governess were still making swabs. It seemed to him that he could not have enough of anything.

About eleven o'clock he strolled out—beautiful night, only just dark enough—under the new arrangement with Time—and went down to the little round fountain below the terrace. His wife was playing the piano. Mr. Bosengate looked at the water and the flat dark waterlily leaves which floated there; looked up at the house, where only narrow chinks of light showed, because of the Lighting Order. The dreamy music drifted out; there was a scent of heliotrope. He moved a few steps back, and sat in the children's swing under an old lime tree. Jolly—blissful—in the warm, bloomy dark! Of all the hours of the day, this before going to bed was perhaps the pleasantest.

He saw the light go up in his wife's bedroom, unscreened for a full minute, and thought, Aha! If I did my duty as a special, I should "strafe" her for that. She came to the window, her figure lighted, hands up to the back of her head, so that her bare arms gleamed. Mr. Bosengate wafted her a kiss, knowing he could not be seen. Lucky chap! he mused; she's a great joy! Up went her arm, down came the blind—the house was dark again.

He drew a long breath. Another ten minutes, he thought, then I'll go in and shut up. By Jove! The limes are beginning to smell already! And, the better to take in that acme of his well-being, he tilted the swing, lifted his feet from the ground, and swung himself towards the scented blossoms. He wanted to whelm his senses in their perfume, and closed his eyes. But instead of the domestic vision he expected, the face of the little Welsh soldier, hare-eyed, shadowy, pinched and dark and pitiful, started up with such disturbing vividness that he opened his eyes again at once. Curse! The fellow almost haunted one! Where would he be now—poor little devil! lying in his cell, thinking—thinking of his wife! Feeling suddenly morbid, Mr. Bosengate arrested the swing and stood up. Absurd!—all his wellbeing and mood of warm anticipation had deserted him! A d——d world! he thought. Such a lot of misery! Why should I have to sit in judgment on that poor beggar, and condemn him? He moved up on to the terrace and walked briskly, to rid himself of this disturbance before going in. That commercial traveller

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chap, he thought, the rest of those fellows—they see nothing! And, abruptly turning up the three stone steps, he entered the conservatory, locked it, passed into the billiard-room, and drank his barley water. One of the pictures was hanging crooked; he went up to put it straight. Still life. Grapes and apples, and lobsters! They struck him as odd for the first time. Why lobsters? The whole picture seemed dead and oily.

He turned off the light, and went upstairs, passed his wife's door, into his own room and undressed. Clothed in his pyjamas he opened the door between the rooms. By the light coming from his own he could see her dark head on the pillow. Was she asleep? No—not asleep, certainly. The moment of fruition had come; the crowning of his pride and pleasure in his home. But he continued to stand there. He had suddenly no pride, no pleasure, no desire; nothing but a sort of dull resentment against everything. He turned back, shut the door, and slipping between the heavy curtains and his open window, stood looking out at the night. Full of misery! he thought. Full of d——d misery!

Filing into the jury box next morning, Mr. Bosengate collided slightly with a short juryman, whose square figure and square head of stiff yellow-red hair he had only vaguely noticed the day before. The man looked angry, and Mr. Bosengate thought, An illbred dog, that!

He sat down quickly, and, to avoid further recognition of his fellows, gazed in front of him. His appearance on Saturdays was always military, by reason of the route march of his Volunteer Corps in the afternoon. Gentleman Fox, who belonged to the corps too, was also looking square; but that commercial traveller on his other side seemed more louche, and as if surprised in immorality, than ever; only the proximity of Gentleman Fox on the other side kept Mr. Bosengate from shrinking. Then he saw the prisoner being brought in, shadowy and dark behind the brightness of his buttons, and he experienced a sort of shock, this figure was so exactly that which had several times started up in his mind. Somehow he had expected a fresh sight of the fellow to dispel and disprove what had been haunting him, had expected to find him just an outside phenomenon, not, as it were a part of his own life. And he gazed at the carven immobility of the Judge's face, trying to steady himself, as a drunken man will, by looking at a light.

The regimental doctor, unabashed by the Judge's comment on his absence the day before, gave his evidence like a man who had better things to do, and the case for the prosecution was forthwith rounded in by a little speech from counsel. The matter—he said

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—was clear as daylight. Those who wore His Majesty's uniform, charged with the responsibility and privilege of defending their country, were no more entitled to desert their regiments by taking their own lives than they were entitled to desert in any other way. He asked for a conviction. Mr. Bosengate felt a sympathetic shuffle passing through all feet; the Judge was speaking.

"Prisoner, you can either go into the witness box and make your statement on oath, in which case you may be cross-examined on it; or you can make your statement there from the dock, in which case you will not be cross-examined. Which do you elect to do?"

"From here, my lord."

Seeing him now full face, and, as it might be, come to life in the effort to convey his feelings, Mr. Bosengate had suddenly a quite different impression of the fellow. It was as if his khaki had fallen off, and he had stepped out of his own shadow, a live and quivering creature. His pinched clean-shaven face seemed to have an irregular, wilder, hairier look, his large nervous brown eyes darkened and glowed; he jerked his shoulders, his arms, his whole body, like a man suddenly freed from cramp or a suit of armour. He spoke, too, in a quick, crisp, rather high voice, pinching his consonants a little, sharpening his vowels, like a true Welshman.

"My lord and misters the jury," he said, "I was a hairdresser when the call came on me to join the Army. I had a little home and a wife. I never thought what it would be like to be away from them, I surely never did; and I'm ashamed to be speaking it out like this—how it can squeeze and squeeze a man, how it can prey on your mind when you're nervous like I am. 'Tis not everyone that cares for his home—there's lots o' them never wants to see their wives again. But for me 'tis like being shut up in a cage, it is!" Mr. Bosengate saw daylight between the skinny fingers of the man's hand thrown out with a jerk. "I cannot bear it shut up away from wife and home like what you are in the Army. So when I took my razor that morning I was wild—an' I wouldn't be here now but for that man catching my hand. There was no reason in it, I'm willing to confess. It was foolish; but wait till you get feeling like what I was, and see how it draws you. Misters the jury, don't send me back to prison; it is worse still there. If you have wives you will know what it is like for lots of us; only some is more nervous than others. I swear to you, sirs, I could not help it—" Again the little man flung out his hand, his whole thin body shook and Mr. Bosengate felt the same sensation as when he drove his car

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over a dog. "Misters the jury, I hope you may never in your lives feel as I've been feeling."

The little man ceased, his eyes shrank back into their sockets, his figure back into its mask of shadowy brown and gleaming buttons, and Mr. Bosengate was conscious that the Judge was making a series of remarks; and, very soon, of being seated at a mahogany table in the jury's withdrawing-room, hearing the voice of the man with hair like an Irish terrier's saying, "Didn't he talk through his hat, that little blighter!"

Conscious, too, of the commercial traveller, still on his left—always on his left!—mopping his brow, and muttering, "Phew! It's hot in there today!" while an effluvium, as of an inside accustomed to whisky, came from him.

Then the man with the underlip and the three plastered wisps of hair said, "Don't know why we withdrew, Mr. Foreman!"

Mr. Bosengate looked round to where, at the head of the table, Gentleman Fox sat, in defensive gentility and the little white piping to his waistcoat. "I shall be happy to take the sense of the jury," he was saying blandly.

There was a short silence, then the chemist murmured, "I should say he must have what they call claustrophobia."

"Clauster fiddlesticks! The feller's a shirker, that's all. Missed his wife—pretty excuse! Indecent, I call it!"

The speaker was the little wirehaired man; and emotion, deep and angry, stirred in Mr. Bosengate. That illbred little cur! He gripped the edge of the table with both hands.

"I think it's d——d natural!" he muttered. But almost before the words had left his lips he felt dismay. What had he said—he, nearly a colonel of Volunteers—endorsing such a want of patriotism! And hearing the commercial traveller murmuring, "'Ear, 'ear!" he reddened violently.

The wirehaired man said roughly, "There's too many of these blighted shirkers, and too much pampering of them."

The turmoil in Mr. Bosengate increased; he remarked in an icy voice, "I agree to no verdict that'll send the man back to prison."

At this a real tremor seemed to go round the table, as if they all saw themselves sitting there through lunchtime. Then the large greyhaired man given to winking said, "Oh! Come, sir—after what the Judge said! Come, sir! What do you say, Mr. Foreman?"

Gentleman Fox—as who should say, This is excellent value, but I don't wish to press it on you!—answered, "We are only concerned with the facts. Did he or did he not try to shorten his life?"

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"Of course he did—said so himself," Mr. Bosengate heard the wirehaired man snap out, and from the following murmur of assent he alone abstained. Guilty! Well—yes! There was no way out of admitting that, but his feelings revolted against handing "that poor little beggar" over to the tender mercy of his country's law. His whole soul rose in arms against agreeing with that illbred little cur, and the rest of this job lot. He had an impulse to get up and walk out, saying, "Settle it your own way. Good morning."

"It seems, sir," Gentleman Fox was saying, "that we're all agreed to guilty, except yourself. If you will allow me, I don't see how you can go behind what the prisoner himself admitted."

Thus brought up to the very guns, Mr. Bosengate, red in the face, thrust his hands deep into the side pockets of his tunic, and, staring straight before him, said, "Very well; on condition we recommend him to mercy."

"What do you say, gentlemen; shall we recommend him to mercy?"

"'Ear, 'ear!" burst from the commercial traveller.

And from the chemist came the murmur, "No harm in that."

"Well, I think there is. They shoot deserters at the front, and we let this fellow off. I'd hang the cur."

Mr. Bosengate stared at that little wirehaired brute. "Haven't you *any* feeling for others?" he wanted to say. "Can't you see that this poor devil suffers tortures?" But the sheer impossibility of doing this before ten other men brought a slight sweat out on his face and hands; and in agitation he smote the table a blow with his fist. The effect was instantaneous. Everybody looked at the wirehaired man, as if saying, "Yes, you've gone a bit too far there!"

The "little brute" stood it for a moment, then muttered surlily, "Well, commend 'im to mercy if you like; I don't care."

"That's right; they never pay any attention to it," said the greyhaired man, winking heartily. And Mr. Bosengate filed back with the others into court.

But when from the jury box his eyes fell once more on the hare-eyed figure in the dock, he had his worst moment yet. Why should this poor wretch suffer so—for no fault, no fault; while he, and these others, and that snapping counsel, and the Caesar-like Judge up there, went off to their women and their homes, blithe as bees, and probably never thought of him again? And suddenly he was conscious of the Judge's voice.

"You will go back to your regiment, and endeavour to serve your country with better spirit. You may thank the jury that you are not sent to prison, and your good fortune that you were

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not at the front when you tried to commit this cowardly act. You are lucky to be alive."

A policeman pulled the little soldier by the arm; his drab figure, with eyes fixed and lustreless, passed down and away. From his very soul Mr. Bosengate wanted to lean out and say, "Cheer up, cheer up! *I* understand."

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening before he reached home, motoring back from the route march. His physical tiredness was abated, for he had partaken of a snack and a whisky and soda at the hotel; but mentally he was in a curious mood. His body felt appeased, his spirit hungry. Tonight he had a yearning, not for his wife's kisses, but for her understanding. He wanted to go to her and say, "I've learnt a lot today—found out things I never thought of. Life's a wonderful thing, Kate, a thing one can't live all to oneself; a thing one shares with everybody, so that when another suffers, one suffers too. It's come to me that what one *has* doesn't matter a bit—it's what one does, and how one sympathises with other people. It came to me in the most extraordinary vivid way, when I was on that jury, watching that poor little rat of a soldier in his trap; it's the first time I've ever felt—the—the spirit of Christ, you know. It's a wonderful thing, Kate—wonderful! We haven't been close—really close, you and I, so that we each understand what the other is feeling. It's all in that, you know; understanding—sympathy—it's priceless. When I saw that poor little devil taken down and sent back to his regiment to begin his sorrows all over again—wanting his wife, thinking and thinking of her just as you know I would be thinking and wanting you, I felt what an awful outside sort of life we lead, never telling each other what we really think and feel, never being really close. I daresay that little chap and his wife keep nothing from each other—live each other's lives. That's what *we* ought to do. Let's get to feeling that what really matters is—understanding and loving, and not only just saying it as we all do, those fellows on the jury, and even that poor devil of a Judge—what an awful life, judging one's fellow-creatures! When I left that poor little Tommy this morning, and ever since, I've longed to get back here quietly to you and tell you about it, and make a beginning. There's something wonderful in this, and I want you to feel it as I do, because you mean such a lot to me."

This was what he wanted to say to his wife, not touching, or kissing her, just looking into her eyes, watching them soften and glow as they surely must, catching the infection of his new ardour. And he felt unsteady, fearfully unsteady with the desire

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to say it all as it should be said: swiftly, quietly, with the truth and fervour of his feeling.

The hall was not lit up, for daylight still lingered under the new arrangement. He went towards the drawing-room, but from the very door shied off to his study and stood irresolute under the picture of a *Man catching a flea* (Dutch school), which had come down to him from his father. The governess would be in there with his wife! He must wait. Essential to go straight to Kathleen and pour it all out, or he would never do it. He felt as nervous as an undergraduate going up for his viva voce. This thing was so big, so astoundingly and unexpectedly important. He was suddenly afraid of his wife, afraid of her coolness and her grace, and that something Japanese about her—of all those attributes he had been accustomed to admire most; afraid, as it were, of her attraction. He felt young tonight, almost boyish; would she see that he was not really fifteen years older than herself, and she not really a part of his collection, of all the admirable appointments of his home; but a companion spirit to one who wanted a companion badly? In this agitation of his soul he could keep still no more than he could last night in the agitation of his senses; and he wandered into the dining-room. A dainty supper was set out there, sandwiches, and cake, whisky and cigarettes—even an early peach. Mr. Bosengate looked at this peach with sorrow rather than disgust. The perfection of it was of a piece with all that had gone before this new and sudden feeling. Its delicious bloom seemed to heighten his perception of the hedge around him, that hedge of the things he so enjoyed, carefully planted and tended these many years. He passed it by uneaten, and went to the window. Out there all was darkening, the fountain, the lime tree, the flowerbeds, and the fields below, with the Jersey cows who would come to your call; darkening slowly, losing form, blurring into soft blackness, vanishing, but there none the less—all there—the hedge of his possessions.

He heard the door of the drawing-room open, the voices of his wife and the governess in the hall, going up to bed. If only they didn't look in here! If only—! The voices ceased. He was safe now—had but to follow in a few minutes, to make sure of Kathleen alone. He turned round and stared down the length of the dark dining-room, over the rosewood table, to where, in the mirror above the sideboard at the far end, his figure bathed, a stain, a mere blurred shadow; he made his way down to it along the table edge, and stood before himself as close as he could get. His throat and the roof of his mouth felt dry with nervousness; he put out his finger and touched his face in the glass. You're an ass! he thought. Pull yourself together, and get it

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over. She will see; of course she will! He swallowed, smoothed his moustache, and walked out. Going up the stairs, his heart beat painfully; but he was in for it now, and marched straight into her room.

Dressed only in a loose blue wrapper, she was brushing her dark hair before the glass. Mr. Bosengate went up to her and stood there silent, looking down. The words he had thought of were like a swarm of bees buzzing in his head yet not one would fly from between his lips. His wife went on brushing her hair under the light which shone on her polished elbows. She looked up at him from beneath one lifted eyebrow.

"Well, dear—tired?"

With a sort of vehemence the single word "No" passed out. A faint, a quizzical smile flitted over her face; she shrugged her shoulders ever so gently. That gesture—he had seen it before! And in a desperate desire to make her understand, he put his hand on her lifted arm.

"Kathleen, stop—listen to me!" His fingers tightened in his agitation and eagerness to make his great discovery known. But before he could get out a word he became conscious of that cool round arm, conscious of her eyes half-closed, sliding round at him, of her half-smiling lips, of her neck under the wrapper. And he stammered, "I want—I must—Kathleen, I—"

She lifted her shoulders again in that little shrug. "Yes—I know; all right!"

A wave of heat and shame and of God knows what came over Mr. Bosengate; he fell on his knees and pressed his forehead to her arm; and he was silent, more silent than the grave. Nothing—nothing came from him but two long sighs. Suddenly he felt her hand stroke his cheek—compassionately, it seemed to him. She made a little movement towards him; her lips met his, and he remembered nothing but that . . .

In his own room Mr. Bosengate sat at his wide-open window, smoking a cigarette; there was no light. Moths went past, the moon was creeping up. He sat very calm, puffing the smoke out into the night air. Curious thing—life! Curious world! Curious forces in it—making one do the opposite of what one wished; always—always making one do the opposite, it seemed! The furtive light from that creeping moon was getting hold of things down there, stealing in among the boughs of the trees. There's something ironical, he thought, which walks about. Things don't come off as you think they will. I meant, I tried—but one doesn't change like that all of a sudden, it seems. Fact is, life's too big a thing for one! All the same, I'm not the man I was yesterday—not quite! He closed his eyes, and in one of those

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flashes of vision which come when the senses are at rest, he saw himself as it were far down below—down on the floor of a street narrow as a grave, high as a mountain, a deep dark slit of a street—walking down there, a black midget of a fellow, among other black midgets—his wife, and the little soldier, the Judge, and those jury chaps—fantoches straight up on their tiny feet, wandering down there in that dark, infinitely tall, and narrow street. Too much for one! he thought. Too high for one—no getting on top of it. We've got to be kind, and help one another, and not expect too much, and not think too much. That's—all! And, squeezing out his cigarette, he took six deep breaths of the night air, and got into bed.

1916

argosy

next month . . .

BRIAN CLEEVE

RAY BRADBURY

WILL F. JENKINS

DARRELL BATES

JOHN & WARD HAWKINS

and others in

argosy

ON SALE
MARCH 8

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I trust I am not a spoil sport,
but there is one thing I deplore,
And that is a party next door.

OGDEN NASH, *The Party Next Door*

Well, it has been three days since my debut party started but I finally got tired and left the party last night and went to bed because I always seem to lose all of my interest in a party after a few days, but Dorothy never loses her interest in a party and when I woke up this morning Dorothy was just saying goodbye to some of the guests. I mean Dorothy seems to have quite a lot of vitality, because the last guests of the party were guests we picked up when the party went to take a swim at Long Beach the day before yesterday . . . So my debut has really been very novel, because quite a lot of the guests who finished up at my party were not the same guests that started out at it.

ANITA LOOS, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

No Party Peace

Drain-pipes, winkle-pickers, jumpers,
Dope and gin, air blue with smoking,
Padded-shoulders, four-inch clumpers,
Whistling, stamping, jeering, joking—
I don't wish to be unjust, but
I've come home tired.

Vocalist shrilling, radio roaring,
Packed like pilchards, squealing, jiving,
Couples cuddling, dead drunks snoring,
Hundreds milling, hordes arriving—
Yes, Mary, I know they must but
I've come home tired.

J. A. LINDON, *You're Only Young Once*

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Breaking the Ice

We were sitting at a table with a man of about my age and a rowdy little girl, who gave way upon the slightest provocation to uncontrollable laughter. I was enjoying myself now. I had taken two finger-bowls of champagne, and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental, and profound.

At a lull in the entertainment the man looked at me and smiled.

"Your face is familiar," he said, politely. "Weren't you in the First Division during the War?" . . .

We talked for a moment about some wet, grey little villages in France. Evidently he lived in this vicinity, for he told me that he had just bought a hydroplane, and was going to try it out in the morning. "Want to go with me, old sport? Just near the shore along the Sound."

"What time?"

"Any time that suits you best."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask his name when Jordan looked around and smiled.

"Having a gay time now?" she inquired.

"Much better." I turned again to my new acquaintance. "This is an unusual party for me. I haven't even seen the host. I live over there—" I waved my hand at the invisible hedge in the distance, "and this man Gatsby sent over his chauffeur with an invitation."

For a moment he looked at me as if he failed to understand.

"I'm Gatsby," he said suddenly.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Rolling Home

But Will has taken off, with scarcely flap of wing,
And offers now a goblet to a pale goose girl.
So I seize a sausage with a cry of pleasure
(Curious, when at home I always avoid them),
Drink from my glass again, essay on Bellenger:
"You are a Londoner?" The thin man nods his head,

Loyally laughing and waiting to add one more
Gay little tale to his shrill wife's about their child.
Turning away, like Will, and fluttering to the door,
"Quite splendid!" I remark, meeting my host by chance,
Wrapped in a scarf of smoke, absently pressing his hand.
Then I float down the stairs alone and into the street,
To pipe my way home. Hooray for a One Man Band!

Nansi Pugh, *The Cocktail Party*

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Calf Love

They emerged into the living-room, which was filled with people, all packed together so tightly that if someone's nose itched he had to go outside to scratch it. A large ivy plant, in a bowl, was clinging to the wall; a number of people were clinging to the ivy plant. People sat on chairs, on cushions on the floor, on bookcases. A young serious-looking girl was sitting on the floor in the corner, smoking a large briar pipe and reading the index to the Talmud. A group of deep-chested young men in the corner were singing a song called "The Bastard King of England." In a row on the settee sat three German students, clearly perplexed by the whole business: "Is this a typical English party, please?" they kept asking people. Treece withdrew with his back to the wall and surveyed the throng. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his leg; he looked down; a stoutish, beaming girl had pulled up his trousers and was biting him familiarly in the calf. She looked up at him and giggled . . .

"Take no notice," said another amiable girl. "She's been doing that to all the men."

"I find it quite painful," said Treece . . .

MALCOLM BRADBURY, *Eating People is Wrong*

Épilogue

My head is like lead, and my temples they bulge,
And my tongue feels like something I wouldn't divulge,
But it's always the way when I overindulge,
Overindulge . . .

My eyes are on fire, my forehead I clutch,
And it's hard to stand up, my condition is such,
But it's always this way when I've taken too much,
Taken too much . . .

PHILIP H. RHINELANDER, *Hangover*

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THE WIND IN THE LONG GRASS

He rode straight in the saddle
—and listened

BY JEB STUART

HE awoke and his eyes probed the dark room as if it were something unfamiliar. Long, blue-veined hands went out from the blanket and felt about him. He recalled slowly. Nothing had changed. He was still in the Home, as he had been for the past sixteen years, the only Indian War veteran in the place.

Before his coming to the Home he had lived with his granddaughter and her husband. That was all right for a while, but when the children were born and grew older he was in the way. He remembered their talking one night.

"It's a nice place, Gertrude," Will had said. "I went up there and looked it over. Very clean. He'll have his own room."

"He has his own room here, Will."

"I know dear, but he is very old and needs more attention as the days go on."

There were a lot of other words that night but, in the end, he was carried to the Home, which was just as Will had described it to him: big, red brick, three-storey building, lots of grass round it, and a nice view of the river from his room.

Everybody was good to him, the nurses, doctors, and attendants, and sometimes the director of the hospital, Dr. Mark Avery, would get him to talk about his Indian experiences. He enjoyed these sessions but it was not always easy to recall the men, events, and places from so long ago; it actually hurt to revive the past. It had been simple enough in earlier times to recall incidents but then he had been in his seventies; the mind was clearer, and it had been fun to summon up the old days; but as he moved on to his eighties something happened to him inside. His mind was still a good sound one, but the whole past had become fuzzy, events telescoped; and, after a while, he just plumb forgot things.

In the earlier days, in his seventies, and in his eighties, too, all kinds of writers used to visit him to ask questions about the Indians and their wars with the white man, telling him, as they

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always did, that he was living history: a veteran of the Indian Wars, and there weren't many such men left, if there were any others living at all, anywhere. So he knew his importance and bore it with dignity and quiet pride.

The door of his room opened. Now what would it be this time, orange juice? Was it mid afternoon, or was it seven o'clock at night and the danged tomato juice? He didn't know, didn't care, and his eyes remained closed. Their voices drifted in.

"I told him you were coming."

"Is he sleeping? I'd hate to disturb him."

"He's just resting. He knows about you." It was Dr. Avery.

Knows about who? Was someone coming to see him? Some time back there had been a person to see him, but he pretended to be sleeping. Went away. Might do the same with this one. Nice to have company come, though.

A soft light came into the room. They had lifted the blind and allowed the afternoon sun to seep through the lace curtains. It was not yet night, and that meant orange juice. Well, he didn't mind the stuff, but tomato juice—oh, now that was something else. But it was better than the prune juice he used to get at Gertrude's.

Dr. Avery was talking. "There seems to be some doubt as to his age. We carry him as ninety-four but his granddaughter claims he's nearer ninety-six."

"He's worn marvellously," the voice said.

Speak up, whatever you are, man or woman, speak up. This silly whispering. Good thing I still got my ears. Can't see like in the old days, and the memory isn't what it used to be, but my ears are tip-top. Always had good ears.

"Major Davies?"

That's me. Front and centre, soldier. Speak up.

"Sir?" Avery leaning closer. "Sir?"

He opened his eyes and saw the faces before him. Dr. Avery, the nurse with a tray and orange juice, and a strange man.

"Ah, there you are, Major Davies."

Where else could I be, for the love of Pete?

"Your juice, sir."

His eyes veered to the nurse. Clean white thing. His lips touched the rim of the glass. It felt cool. The orange juice flowed down into him. Pleasant taste. He moved his head aside and the glass was removed. Her hand, sweet scent on it, dabbed his lips with a soft napkin.

"This is Mr. Berkmeister, Major Davies."

His eyes wavered and then converged on the stranger. Brown suit, brown eyes, or was it all black? Can't see like in the old days.

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"Yes?" he replied, his voice a thin, hollow sound.

"Mr. Berkmeister has come to ask you some questions. He's writing a book."

I was going to write a book one time but never got around to it. Been in a few, but that was some time ago.

"I hope you don't mind my coming, sir."

"No," he said.

"I don't want to tire you, sir."

Dr. Avery talking. "Just ask your questions. He'll answer them—if he can remember. He's not as keen as in the old days."

Old days? What do you know of the old days? You know nothing.

"Will you tell me about your ride to General Parrish, sir, after the battle at Yellow Tail River?"

Yellow Tail River? Funny for someone to ask about that.

"There was Lieutenant Swan," he said.

"Yes, yes, that's right, Major Davies. We've discovered Lieutenant Swan's diary. It's been in a box for many, many years, sir. Your name is mentioned in it. Will you tell me what happened on the ride, sir?"

He remembered Yellow Tail and the ride to General Parrish. Colonel Barrows, one arm in a sling, said the next day after the big fight at Yellow Tail, "I've some important information for General Parrish in Redango, Captain Davies. Will you take three men and go?"

Couldn't say anything else but yes. Took Swan and my two best scouts. Started off at eight thirty at night.

"In his diary, sir, Swan writes you saved the party. You led them through the Indian camp. Can you remember that, sir?"

He closed his eyes, remembering. Wasn't me; was Star. His body trembled.

"It was Star," he whispered.

"Star, sir? There were four of you, according to Swan's diary and the military records in Washington. You, Swan, and two scouts, Thunder Sky and Blue Grass."

"Star did it," he insisted.

"Who was Star, sir?"

Every once in a while it comes back to me. I can't forget him. If there was only a way to make it up to him, I'd do it.

"Major Davies, will you tell me who Star was, sir?"

Dr. Avery talking, explaining. "Lately, he doesn't remember too well."

That's not true, I remember everything. Oh, there are times a little forgetfulness crops up, but it all comes back again, after a while.

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The voice of the old man became curiously strong for a moment. "A cavalryman is nothing without his horse. It's like foot and boot," he said.

"I didn't get that, sir," the writer replied. "What about the cavalry?"

That's how it was with Star and me. He was a good, sweet animal.

"We took a licking. The redskins all but wiped us out," the old man declared. "No help came. Ninety-seven gone out of a hundred and twenty."

"At Yellow Tail, sir?" the writer questioned, his tone registering his amazement. "According to War Department records, the battle at Yellow Tail was a victory for the Federal troops. I don't understand, sir."

Fool man, why doesn't he understand? It was before Yellow Tail and before Star and before everything that happened afterwards. I don't know why this man came if he won't listen.

"We marched sixty miles that day before we reached the Post," the Major said. "Crossed Yellow Tail River and entered the Post just before the sun went down."

"It was the battle before Yellow Tail?" the writer exclaimed. "One of those small encounters, I suppose. It's not carried in the records."

So much not carried in the records. Oh, if you had only come to me when I was a younger man.

"It was winter," he moaned to the men. "So cold."

"Yes, that's right," the writer agreed. "It was one of the worst winters in history."

He saw it again, the long frame building that the Command had assigned to the survivors. No stoves, no fire; blankets and buffalo robes; new carbines, revolvers, sabres, and horses.

A chuckle, perhaps of derision, escaped the lips of the man in the bed. Both men before him smiled, but selfconsciously, as if the old man had, possibly, laughed at them.

Sorry-looking horses! Shave-tail plugs looked like to me. Wasn't one worthy of riding, except for the big chestnut.

"It was love at first sight," the old man said happily, his eyes opening fully for the first time, the blue in them acquiring a flush of youth.

"He must mean his wife. His granddaughter told me her grandparents were married soon after Yellow Tail," the doctor said.

No, not that, gentlemen. It was something very different. Oh, why do you talk so much and not let me finish what I have to say? I'm talking about Star. Stood alone, off by himself in

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a stall away from the plugs. Lovely chestnut. Star smack between his ears.

"Thought the Colonel would die," the Major said aloud, chuckling.

"Colonel? Colonel Overholt at Yellow Tail, sir?"

Go home, man. Let me be. Let's have an end to your foolish questioning. Colonel Overholt. I'll tell you about him. He was—well, I won't say now—not now that he's dead. However, mister, I was referring to Colonel Weeks at the Post. Administrative, not combat, but he was all right.

Sir, I said to Weeks, I'd like to have that chestnut. He glanced once at me and the big chestnut. What in the Sam Hill do you want with him, Davies? Mean as all get-out. Was fixing to destroy him. Not a man here can ride him.

Didn't want to tell him that there wasn't a real horseman in the Command. Oh, they could ride, plod along in march step for days, weeks and months, but they didn't have the touch.

"I can handle him, sir," the man in the bed stated in a firm voice, startling the doctor, nurse, and writer.

"Do you think we're tiring him, Doctor? I don't feel I'm coming through to him," the visitor commented.

The old man gripped the bedcovers. He didn't want them leaving, not when he was about to confess what he did to Star. It was a long time ago and he had tried to hide from the truth, but there is no hiding-place left after so many years.

He said, "I'm not tired, Doctor. Please stay."

"Thank you, Major Davies," the writer said. "Please tell me, sir, about Star. Was he an Indian scout like Thunder Sky and Blue Grass?"

The Colonel looked at me and shrugged. Break your neck, Davies. I don't care. He gave me the horse.

"We were friends right down the line," the Major said, addressing his words to the visitor.

"Star?" the writer questioned.

"Yes," the old man replied. He put his hand on his mouth as if to hold back the next words but they came out, even if haltingly. "I let him down. He saved my life and I let him down."

God, if only I could meet up with him again and tell him how sorry I am for what I did to him. He was a good critter. Stood with me through it all at Yellow Tail. We never got hit.

"Men died, horses died, ran wild, trumpets sounded. I lay burrowed deep in the ground. I got my share of them and they never hit me."

"And after that battle you delivered the message to General Parrish. Is that correct, sir?" the writer asked.

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"General Parrish," the old man muttered. He nodded several times.

Why do you insist on Parrish? He was holding a party when I got through. We got past the Indians and when we arrived, there was a party in full swing. Ladies and music.

We near died out there, and all the time there was a wing-ding of a party.

"Left the Post for General Parrish at eight thirty at night," the old man said, a finger held up stiffly. He moved his hand as if indicating the sky. "Dark and cold."

Dark night. No stars. Moon clouded over and mist on the earth. Marched forty miles. Good night for it. Indians camping. We moved fast. Forty miles? Maybe fifty. Pulled up on a hill. Good position for the morning. We rested.

"Marched forty miles first night," the Major said.

"Oh, thank you, sir," the writer said. "Swan said only that it was a long march the first night. Forty miles. Thank you, sir." He wrote the figure in his notebook.

The other three rested. Swan, Blue Grass, and Thunder Sky. Best shots in the whole Army—along with me. They were tired, all right. Not me. Funny, not me. Kept my head. Good thing, too. Climbed a tree and sat in a fork. Good thing. Saw them coming through the valley. Twenty on horseback. Rifles. Went back to the others. "Coming," I said.

"I counted them," the Indian War veteran said, holding his fingers. "Twenty. Counted them, myself."

"Indians?"

"Twenty against five."

"You mean four, don't you, sir? You, Swan, and the two scouts."

Five. Star. Don't forget him. Put him in the book.

"This is entirely new material here, Doctor. I can't tell you how grateful I am for letting me talk to him," the writer said.

The eyes of the Indian-fighter flashed with resentment. "Five," he said. "Swan, the two scouts, myself, and Star."

"Who is Star?"

Never saw us as they came through the valley under our hill. We picked our men. Fifty yards.

"At fifty yards we fired," he said. "I called it. 'Fire,' I said."

Four went down. Ran wild. Plumb scared. Never saw us. They fell back. Tried to get their dead. Swan and Blue Grass picked off two more.

"Kept us under fire after that. Occupied every bluff but they never hit us."

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"Swan in his diary said you were up against five hundred Indians."

The old man moistened his lips. Swan said five hundred? He was the sort to tell a long story. Very young man. Twenty-two. Lieutenant Swan. Very good shot.

"Roughly a little more than a hundred altogether, including the party of twenty we ambushed," the Indian-fighter said gravely.

"That does make more sense," the writer said, writing. "A little more than a hundred Indians against four—or rather, five."

"Eight," the Major said.

"Eight? I thought you said five?"

"I told you," the doctor said, "he's given to forgetting."

Eight. They were plugs, all right, but they did a good job. Put it down as eight. Man or beast. What does it matter? We all went through the same hell. Swan, the two scouts, Star, me, and the three plugs. What is that? Eight? Yes, eight. Write it that way in your book. Eight lives, that's all. Don't be partial.

"Night came and with it rain. Rain like I never saw before in my life. Black sheets of rain," the old man said mournfully.

Helped us. Can't say it didn't. Left everything behind, except our rifles, water, some hard bread, ammunition, and our sabres. Put our blankets over our heads and shoulders and went through the line of redskins. Thought we were Indians in the dark. "Went past their pickets and they thought we were some of them."

"The Indians thought you were Indians and so you escaped? Well, that's the way Swan tells it. He said you led the party through the lines. It's in his diary, Major."

"No, sir," the old man replied with a sudden vehemence.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" the writer asked.

"It was Star."

"We must get to the bottom of this Star business, Major Davies. It's terribly important." The writer grasped the thin, browned hand of the veteran. "Sir. Major Davies, will you tell me, who was Star?" He waited, biting his lips. His hand came up and thoughtfully massaged his chin. "Was Star a horse, sir? Perhaps that was it, Major?"

Horse? Oh, more than that, mister. Call the plugs that, if you will, but Star . . . well . . . well, he was a soldier clean through to the heart.

"He knew Indian country better than any man I ever met. Star saved us, and I let him down for it. Can't forgive myself for it."

The writer shrugged. "I guess that's clear enough. Star was an Indian scout."

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" It sounds like it," the doctor replied.

The Major drew his hand weakly over his dry lips and sighed heavily.

" I guess the old man must be tired. I ought to run along," the writer said. He turned to the Major. " Thank you very much, sir, for your help. I hope we didn't tire you too much." He waited for some acknowledgment from the old man. " Thank you again, sir. Good-bye." He started for the door.

" Young man! " the Indian veteran called out clearly.

" Sir? " the visitor replied, returning to the bedside.

" It wasn't me, no matter what Swan said. It was Star. Put it down that way. Hear? "

" I will, sir. Thank you. Good night."

The doctor said quietly, " Nurse, sit with the Major."

" Yes, sir."

He heard the departure of the two men and then listened to the enveloping stillness in the room. The old man turned his head to the door.

" Nurse? " he whispered. He felt her, scented her near him, her cool hand on his forehead. " Are they gone? "

" All gone," she said gently.

Gone? Oh, why did they go? He wanted to tell them about what happened to Star.

" Gone," he said in a very weak voice.

" Rest, Major Davies," she suggested, tucking the blankets about him.

How can I rest? Not while I think of what I did to him. They sent me away. Transferred me east and I left him at the Post. Didn't even say good-bye to him. Don't know how I could have done it. Left him in the dark stall and I never returned. If only he would come along some day and let me make it up to him.

He gasped suddenly for breath. The nurse reached out for his wrist. She frowned and felt through the delicate flesh. Then her hand went quickly to the rubber cord, and her finger pressed the button. Over the transom a red light flashed.

" Now, now," she crooned at him.

He heard her. Sweet thing, he thought.

" Now, now," she chanted softly.

He closed his eyes tightly but there was no darkness, but, rather, the most brilliant golden light. He saw Star galloping towards him, forelock flying. The big chestnut came up and stood trembling. He quieted the horse until it was still and then leapt on to its back, wheeling it about towards the highest hill.

He rode straight in the saddle and listened to the wind in the long grass.

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LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

This girl was a peach, a real contest winner—with that pale gold hair

BY JOAN AIKEN

"THIS sewing-machine will last you over sixty years without needing repair or maintenance," said Henry Dulge. He took a quick look at the housewife; that should see her well into her hundred-and-twenties. "It is rustless, foolproof, perfectly insulated, five pounds down, and forty-eight weekly payments of nineteen and eleven. I'll leave it with you for a week's trial, shall I? Or will you sign right away, here's the form . . ."

"It's ever so kind of you," she said faintly. "But in your ad it said—what I wrote up for was—"

"And of course that entitles you to free servicing and repair for the first six months; not that you are going to need that with this machine, ha ha!"

"You did say you had reconditioned models for sale at £8," she persisted timidly.

His face changed. "Oh well, of course, if you want *that* sort of stuff . . . We *did* have just a few, but they're trash, let me assure you, madam, trash! Why, you'd only use it for a few days before you'd be begging me to change it for a new one. Now this lovely model here, you can make all your children's clothes on it, it's like a dream to handle—"

"Haven't you one of the £8 models in your car that I could just look at?" she pleaded.

He hesitated. But it was pouring with rain and she looked the sort that could be browbeaten. "No, I haven't as a matter of fact," he snapped. "Sold the last one to a silly old fool who didn't know a bad bargain when she saw one. Now you be sensible, madam, just you take my advice, and you'll never regret it—"

She wavered. "Well—I do want to get on with my husband's winter shirts—" He handed her the pen.

At this critical moment her husband came home from work, beer-flavoured and hungry for his supper.

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"What the blazes is going on here?" taking in the whole situation—the poised pen, the form with its mass of small print, the seductive glitter of the sewing-machine, and Henry Dulge's truculence suddenly turning ingratiating.

"I was just explaining to your good lady here—"

She gave her husband an alarmed, pleading smile, but he was wasting no time.

"Out! And take your blasted machine with you! I'll have no never-never in my house. Out!"

The rain blattered against the window. Henry Dulge was not a coward. He rallied for a last attempt—but the husband moved towards him threateningly so he abandoned the idea, and picking up the machine, said with an angry, pitying laugh, "Well, I'm afraid you're going to be very, very sorry for this, madam. You won't often get the chance of such a bargain," and departed, slamming the door behind him.

Rain sluiced over the aluminium cover of the machine, and he had to rub it dry, cursing, before he drove off into the drenching dusk. He was so annoyed at having missed what promised to be an easy sale that instead of finding a hotel for the night, as he had intended, he drove straight through the town and on along the coast towards Crowbridge.

The rain spun down in his headlights, thick as thatch, and bounced off the shingle-spattered road. Every half-mile or so illuminated signs by the roadside warned, *This road impassable during Spring Tides when tide is high.* Dulge had no notion whether the tide was at springs or neaps, but in any case it was satisfactorily far out—only occasionally when the road curved up over a bluff did he catch a glimpse of tossing, menacing white-caps far to his right.

He passed a solitary, plodding walker—a tramp, to judge from his pack and ragged coat—and took a mean pleasure in cutting close past the man to spray him with mud and sand from the wheels. The fellow must be soaked through, anyway; a bit extra wouldn't make much odds.

Ten miles farther on, however, he overtook another pedestrian, this time a girl. She was wearing a dark rain-cape, but the lights picked out the white kerchief over her hair. His chivalry came to the fore, and he pulled in beside her and opened the door.

"Hop in, mermaid," he said jovially. She seemed startled, but thanked him, and settled quietly beside him. He let in the clutch, pleased with this bit of luck: this girl was a peach, a real contest winner; looked a bit chilled with the wet and cold—what the devil was she doing walking along the coast road at this time of night?—but a top-notch figure, what he could see

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of it, and classy, too, with that pale-gold hair trained back from a high forehead.

"Dangerous along here, didn't you know?" he said. "Wouldn't want the tide to wash away a pretty girl like you."

"Oh, I often walk this way," she said carelessly. "There is no danger if you know the state of the tide."

"Live in Crowbridge?"

"Yes, I have a house there."

"All on your own?"

She nodded. His eyes widened. This seemed an unbelievably promising situation. "That makes two of us, then. Here's me, a poor bachelor, don't know a soul in the town. How about cheering me up? Have dinner with me at the Ship Inn?"

"You are kind," she said, "but I never eat at inns."

"How about inviting me round to your place, then? Take pity on the stranger, eh?"

She looked at him oddly. "I never invite guests. Those who wish for my hospitality must find the way themselves."

They had entered the small port of Crowbridge and were climbing the main street towards the Upper Town. Street-lamps, wildly swinging from their brackets, threw shifting gleams of light on Tudor gables and brickwork.

"I won't be shy in finding the way, darling, believe me. What's your name? Where do you live?"

"I live near here," she said. "If you will be so kind as to put me down."

"Ah, come on now, darling. At least have a quick one with me at the old Ship, to keep out the wet."

"Thank you, no, I—"

But he drove on. He was forced to stop, however, at the traffic lights, and to his annoyance, she somehow managed to slip out—heaven knows how she did it, for he had locked the door on purpose and that catch was the devil to shift. Before he could utter a word or curse she was gone, following the flutter of her kerchief into the dark rainy night. The lights changed to green and a furious hooting from behind forced him on, damning her wholeheartedly. But Crowbridge was a small town; maybe someone at the pub would know who she was.

He made straight for the bar and had three doubles in quick succession to sink the memory of the missed sale and the mislaid pick-up. Then he inquired about a bed for the night.

"Sorry, sir. I'm afraid we're full right up."

"Full up? In October? Are you crazy?"

"It's the county farmers' annual conference, sir. Always held in Crowbridge. I'm afraid you won't find a bed in the town.

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I know for a fact they're full at the Crown and the George, we've had people come on from there."

"For Pete's sake! Isn't there anywhere in the town I can sleep—digs, boarding-house, anything?" He appealed to the other drinkers in the bar. "Can't any of you gentlemen suggest something? It's thirty miles on to Castlegate."

They hesitated. "The road's flooded, too, between here and Castlegate," put in the barman. "I doubt you'd not get through that way."

"Well," said one man, "he could sleep at the Old Dormer House."

"What's that?" Henry's hopes rose. "A boarding-house?"

"No, it's a private house. As a matter of fact it's empty now—due for demolition. Work starts tomorrow. The Council's been itching to get it out of the way for years but they couldn't touch it till the last of the family died, which she did a couple of months back—old lady of ninety-three. Historic sort of place; some society's been complaining about the demolition, but the house sticks right out into a crossroads, makes a very dangerous corner."

"Ah well, some of these old places have got to come down; you can't keep 'em all," Henry agreed. "But I can't stay there if it's empty, can I? I don't fancy sleeping on bare boards."

"Ah, you see, that's the point. It's a kind of a celebrated house, the Old Dormer—you're sure you haven't heard of it?"

"No, never—"

"There's a tradition that if anyone asks to stay, the family will allow them to—Hardistry, the family name was; belonged to the Hardistrys since the first Elizabeth's time—and give them free fire and bedding. A clause in the old lady's will, the Miss Hardistry who just died, said this custom was to be kept up till demolition started. So you'll find a fire and a bed there."

"Free fire and bedding? Sounds too good to be true! Maybe my luck's changing. And about time too."

"There's another thing—"

"Well?"

"Anyone who stays there till eight o'clock next morning has a right to claim a thousand pounds from the Estate."

"*A thousand pounds?* What do you think I am? A sucker?"

But all the men in the bar assured him that this was perfectly true. They were quite serious. Henry, studying the faces, began to believe them.

"But has nobody ever claimed it yet?"

"Not one. It's haunted, you see."

"Haunted? By what?" Henry looked sceptical. "I'd like

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to see the ghost that could shift *me* out of a free bed and a thousand pounds."

"By one of the family, a girl called Bess Hardistry who lived in the first Elizabeth's time. The story goes that her young man fell in love with the Queen. He was so dazzled that he went off and forgot Bess, sailed to discover the Indies and was never seen again. She turned bitter and sour, lived to be very old, and was finally burnt as a witch. Since then no one but the family has been able to spend a night in the house because she gives them terrible dreams."

Henry burst out laughing. "She'll be lucky if she can give me any dreams! Why, it's a pushover! Can you do me dinner here?" he asked the barman.

"Why, yes, sir, we can manage that."

"All right, you give me some dinner, and then tell me where to find this place. By the way," he added, remembering, "can you tell me the name of a girl who lives on her own here; very pretty girl, about twenty-five, pale-blonde hair?"

"No, sir, I can't say I can call her to mind," said the barman. "But I haven't been here long." The other men shook their heads. Did some of them look at Henry oddly? It was probably his hunger that made him imagine them suddenly pale and remote, as if seen through glass; he would pursue the matter when he'd had a good dinner.

The Ship dinner was excellent, but the service was slow. It was near closing time when Henry returned to the bar, and by now he was feeling tired. The men who had been there before were gone, and the barman seemed preoccupied. Why bother about the girl? If she was lost, she was lost, no sense whining over her. He had a couple more whiskies fairly quickly, put his car in the town carpark, and took the direction the barman had given him.

The rain had let up a little, but it was still too dark to see much of the Old Dormer House, and he was in no mood to linger. He pushed open the heavy door and climbed the stairs. No electricity, but he had his powerful flashlight, and from somewhere above he could see the glow and hear the comfortable crackle of a blazing fire.

A few rooms he looked into were empty, already stripped of their furniture, but, following the firelight, he found a big stately bedroom with a carpet and chairs and a blue-silk-hung fourposter. It smelt delicious, of apple-wood and lavender. Henry dumped his wet valise on the carpet with a grunt of content and punched the mattress.

"This certainly beats the Old Ship," he said to himself with

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satisfaction. "I bet Queen Elizabeth never slept on *that*."

Apart from himself the house seemed empty. He undressed, leisurely, by the leaping fire, replenished it from a basket of logs, bolted the door, and got into bed. The bed was even warm—you might have thought that one of those Elizabethan things—what did they call them?—warming-pans, had just been taken out of it.

And when he was more than halfway into the mist of sleep, a pair of warm arms came round his neck, and a voice said gently in his ear, "Did you think you weren't going to see me again? I knew you'd find your way here."

"Is that you, darling?" Henry murmured sleepily. "My luck surely has turned. But how did you get in?"

"I was here already. Don't you see? I live here . . ."

It was after him. It was gaining on him. A hundred, five hundred people, women mostly, were watching him with hating eyes, cheering it on, and it was plunging along the road behind him, its great wheel letting off blue sparks as it whirled round, the gigantic needle munching steadily towards him, cutting the tar of the road as if it were cheese. Now it was right alongside him and he was paralysed, unable to stir, and the needle was above him, vibrating, poised for the terrible downward thrust that would pin him to the bed like a butterfly—

He woke sweating, screaming, struggling with the bedclothes. Instinctively he turned to seek the comfort of his bedmate but she was gone. Could he feel something metallic and ice-cold among the sheets? He leapt out as if he had found a snake in the bed. The grip of nightmare was still on him and he started pulling on his clothes with trembling haste, all other considerations forgotten in the urge to be gone. He kept glancing haggardly at the ceiling, as if he expected the great bright needle to come plunging through and impale him. The fire burnt bright, but he never noticed the portrait on the wall of a pale, gilt-haired girl smiling primly above her ruff; he overlooked the scatter of clothes on a chair, the brocade skirts, the little shoes with jewelled buckles. He unbolted the door with shaking hands, was down the stairs in a flash, and running for the carpark like a hunted thing. The rain had stopped, but dead leaves like packs of wolves scurried in the streets and the wind shook and grappled with him as he unlocked the car. Not a soul stirred: it was the dead hour of night.

He found a board across the Castlegate road saying: *Floods. Impassable*—and turned back the way he had come, the coast road to Trowchester. The tide was nearly full now, he could hear the roar of the waves like a thousand sewing-machines, and

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he cast a nervous glance in the rear mirror, half wondering if he would see *It* coming steadily along behind, munching up the miles. What a hell of a dream. He would have to pack in the job if he had many more like that.

When he turned his eyes back to the road in front, he found the girl sitting in the car by him. He gasped something incoherently. His hands shook and slipped on the wheel.

"You didn't think I'd stay behind, did you?" she said. "I'm coming with you. They're pulling my house down tomorrow, I shall have nowhere to live. It was lucky you came to see me tonight. Now I can come and live in *your* house."

"You can't, you can't!" he gabbled. "I've got a wife—children—"

He jabbed his foot on the accelerator and the car swooped up over a bluff, following the winding coast road. But on the far side of the bluff there was no road, only the white-capped waves, warring with the dark of the night, grinding like a thousand sewing-machines. His car ran smoothly into them and disappeared.

At about the same time two policemen were interrogating a tramp in the streets of Crowbridge. "Let's have a look in that pack of yours," one of them said, mistrusting the raggedness of the man and the suspicious weight of the pack.

"I object," the tramp said with dignity. "It's starting to rain again and I don't want my things all wet."

"You'll have to come to the station, then."

He accompanied them without protest. He was a blue-eyed, weatherbeaten man who might have been any age between forty and seventy. His pack, opened at the police station, proved to contain sheets of paper covered with handwriting, and books.

"Russian," whispered one of the constables. "Think he's a red spy, Sarge?"

"That's Greek, you ignorant thick," said the sergeant, who had been in Crete. "All right, you can go. Be a bit more cooperative another time."

"It's coming down hard now," the tramp said mildly. "I suppose you can't put me up for the night in a cell?"

"Sorry, mate, cells all full up."

"He could go to the Old Dormer," the constable said.

"Where's that?" the tramp asked.

The sergeant considered him a moment and then said, "Well, I suppose it won't do no harm. The house is coming down tomorrow anyway." They told him how to get there.

It was raining hard again. The tramp made haste to get indoors, but then, instead of going upstairs, found the big stone-flagged

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kitchen with its massive table, and pulled up a chair. He took a piece of paper, a pencil, and a lump of cheese from his pack, and began writing, slowly, with many crossings-out, absently taking a bite of cheese from time to time.

About half an hour later he jumped violently, suddenly aware that someone was looking over his shoulder.

"Why don't you come upstairs?" she said. "There's a fire upstairs."

"Blimey, you gave me a start," he said. "I never heard you come in."

"Come up by the fire," she repeated.

"All right, miss. It's very kind of you. I'll just finish this."

He wrote for another ten minutes, and then followed her to the room with the fourposter. The bed was smoothly made, the fire leaping. "Nice place," he said with appreciation, looking round. He sat by the fire.

"Wouldn't you like to go to bed?" she asked.

"Well, thanks, miss, but I'm not sleepy. Had a good kip under a hedge this afternoon, I think I'll read for a bit."

"That was a sonnet you were writing, wasn't it? Why do you write sonnets?"

"I dunno, really. I just took a fancy to. That's why I'm on the roads. I used to be a seaman, radio technician, till I retired and had me own little business. Then I took this fancy for writing sonnets and teaching meself languages. Well, after all, you've only got one life, got to please yourself some time, haven't you? So my daughter and son-in-law that I lived with, they got fed up and gave me the push."

"Your own daughter turned you out?" she said, shocked.

"You couldn't blame her, lass, with me not bringing in any money. Matter of fact, I've been happier since then than ever before in me life. No worries, got my own little transistor set if ever I feel lonely. Like a bit of music?"

He pulled a small flat box from his pocket, turned a switch, and suddenly the room was filled with sweet, orderly sound.

"Hear that? Good, isn't it? That's Vladivostock. Made the set myself."

"But this is a galliard!" she said, her face lighting up. "We used to dance to it! Like this!"

She rose and began turning and gliding before him, holding up her brocade skirts so that the jewels in her buckled shoes glittered in the firelight.

"Bravo!" he said. "That's better than Sadler's Wells!"

"You dance too!" She caught at his hand. "Oh, what a long time it is since I danced!"

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"Me, lass? I don't know how. Only thing I ever learnt was the two-step."

"I'll show you—see how easy it is! The music carries you."

And indeed it did seem as if the music was guiding him through the intricate, courtly maze of the dance. He stepped erectly, and his blue eyes shone at her as she moved and dipped, graceful as a ship under full sail. One dance followed another, and yet he was not tired, or conscious of any incongruity in the fact that he, in his rags and broken shoes, should be treading this measure with so stately a lady. At last the music came to an end and she swept him a deep curtsey.

"See!" she said. "We have danced so long that dawn is breaking. I never thought to dance so again."

"So we have. So we have. But I don't feel a bit tired. I believe that I could walk sixty miles this very minute."

He looked out of the window. A wild and ragged dawn was breaking over the wet roofs of the town. Pointed gables gleamed in the first light.

"I'd best be off, I reckon. Thank you kindly for the night's lodging, lass."

"There's a thousand pounds for you if you wait here till eight o'clock," she said. "Stay a bit longer."

He looked blank, then laughed. "What good is a thousand to me? They better build themselves a new school or do something useful with it. No, thank you all the same, I'll be on the move—"

He was halfway along the coast road, where the shingle lay in gleaming heaps, scattered by the receding tide, when he heard her light step behind him.

"Will you let me come with you, old man?" she called.

"And welcome, lass, if you want to."

She tucked her arm in his. "Can we have a bit of music?"

A coastguard, coming out early to survey the storm damage, saw the tramp but not the girl. Till the end of his life he carried a memory of the man with ragged clothes and smiling blue eyes, free as the air, stepping out briskly along the battered road to the music of Mr. William Byrd.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

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new short novel

NOISY IN THE DOGHOUSE

by V. S. PRITCHETT

SORRY to hear about you and Claudia, Bob," Noisy Brackett said, finishing a glass of beer and leaving me at the Crown one morning. "The Fairy Queen on the job again, I suppose? Take a tip from me. The next time you get engaged to a lovely thing like Claudia, steer clear of Fairy Queens. They turn funny when they see another girl get her man. Their little brains start working."

The Fairy Queen was his name for that rich woman who lived up at Heading Mount and who had divorced him two years before. After what had happened at her house the night she had asked Claudia and me to dinner, Claudia had broken off our engagement.

I could see Noisy knew the story. Everyone in the town knew it. When I walked up the street everyone from the dogs upwards was silently giving me advice: Fall for a divorced woman, ten years older than yourself—and some said twenty—don't be a fool, boy. I despised them all, but not Noisy. He had been married to her once, I was in love with her; he and I were the only normal men in the town and that was a thought I clung to. For the more I loved her the more I wanted to be saved from her, and Noisy was a living example of that salvation.

One good thing—the weather broke. Gales blew over the countryside and tore down the telephone wires. We were cut off from Heading for a day or two. Mother had a fright when the bakehouse chimney caught fire at the back of the shop—she thought our shop had gone; this, and the sign blowing off at

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our café, kept me outside and out of her sight. She had got as nervy as the weather. I would find her sitting beside Father's photograph which stood on a table by the window when I got in. She would get up and move about the room, trying the brown leather chair of the three-piece first, but it disagreed with her in some way.

She moved to the next chair and glared back at the other as if it had deceived her. But now her arms couldn't settle to this one either, and she lifted her elbow to see why. Then her knees got annoyed; with a groan she got up and returned to the upright chair by the window, and turned my father's photograph an inch or so to the light, as if she were trying to shake him into talking to her.

This happened night after night. While Mother was doing this, I had one eye on her and one on the newspaper, but my mind was four miles away up at Heading with Mrs. Brackett, trying to catch sight of her face as it floated by, but all I could see was the drawing-room there and its three white-painted doors—the door she and I had come in by, the open door leading to the room where her farming papers were scattered over the floor, and a third door at the end of the room, which was closed. I never knew a door so closed. It watched us like a conscience. It seemed even to watch me now when I was at home. I could hear Mrs. Brackett saying, "What are you doing here at this time of night, Mr. Fraser?" But the only thing I could remember was the parting in her hair, for she had kept her head lowered when she was sitting beside me.

After that, I would try without any luck to see again that small movement in the pupil of one of her blue eyes, a movement as tiny as the click of a camera shutter, when she looked up to say good-bye.

I was going to say, "Where does that door lead to?" but the sight of her eye taking a cool snapshot of what was going on inside me, stopped me—and, like a fool, I left.

I looked at Mother over my paper. She was staring at me, afraid of me and herself. We could not go on like this. So one evening when I came in from the Crown, I dived into it. I thought I would make her laugh.

"Major Dingle," I said—he was Claudia's father—"Major Dingle," I said, "says I ought to be horsewhipped."

No answer from Mother.

"He said it to Lord Fobham over at the Crown. Noisy told me," I said.

Mother was still silent, but when Noisy's name came up she reached for her handbag and looked for the mirror.

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"Lord Fobham said—" I went on.

"I don't want to know what Lord Fobham or any of those pots said," Mother said.

And she didn't. Mother thought it was wrong to know what people like that talked about, just as she mistrusted foreigners. They were "daft," and she was sorry for them.

"He said, Lord Fobham said," I went on, "'Can't do that. No horses. Nothing but cars. The roads weren't made for them.'"

"Where's the cleverness in that?" Mother said. "We know who needs the tanning. The telephone's working again. She's been on the line three times this morning. I told her you were out."

Mrs. Brackett, of course! She was after me—what did I tell you?

"What did she order?" I said, playing it light.

"Order?" said Mother. "She was a good customer till you and her husband went stark staring mad."

We were silent again. I thought of something else: I had heard a rumour going round.

"Teddy Longfellow says Noisy's got an Argentine girl now, an air hostess," I said. "They say he's going to marry her."

I couldn't have said anything worse if I'd tried.

I thought Mother was going to hit the ceiling, burst, have a heart attack, or die. I'd never seen her face go so purple, then almost black. It nearly doubled its size.

Her voice was always loud, but now she shouted, "I won't have you going over to the Red Lion like this." (I don't know why, she always called the Crown, the Red Lion.) "You know what drink did to your father. Teddy Longfellow was a German spy in the war. He signalled—don't ask me who he signalled to, but he signalled. Everyone knows he signalled."

And Mother jumped up, went to the window and pulled the blind down three inches, as if she too were signalling—but for the Army or someone to come and help her defend the country.

If she had seen Noisy, or if she had seen Teddy Longfellow scratching his beard—he always picked at his beard at one corner of his mouth when he talked—she would have called out, "Help! I'm signalling. Didn't you see it? I'm signalling. Come in. You've upset me, both of you."

"Chinese air hostess!" she turned, raging, on me. "There aren't any Chinese here. Don't be a fool."

"Argentine," I said.

"You're always contradicting what I say," she said.

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She sat down and became fretful.

"He can't," she said. "He's a married man."

"He's divorced," I said.

"You keep telling me that. I'm not deaf," she said. "The rat—why did he let her?"

There was a long silence; she was frightened by what she had said.

At last she became calm. She took out her handkerchief in case she was going to need it.

"I didn't mean that—not rat," she said.

She put her handkerchief back in her bag. Then she scowled.

"Argentine meat," she said mournfully. "Your father would never touch it."

And then Mr. Rollick, the solicitor, came over to see us.

"Good evening, Mrs. Fraser," said Mr. Rollick. "The wind's still bad, but you've got the bloom of spring on you."

His nose, Mother said to me afterwards, had the bloom on it too.

We were waiting for him; in fact that is why Mother had on her dark blue dress and had her large handbag beside her. A lucky thing had happened, and if it hadn't I think I might have gone mad with my mind fixed on Mrs. Brackett. The Mill House at Galeford Priors had come up for sale privately, and Mother and I jumped at the chance of it—Mother because she liked a bit of property, and I because I knew it was cheap and because, as Father used to say, "Nothing clears the mind like buying property. It sobers you up."

But buying the Mill House gave us only a small respite. Since the night Claudia had broken our engagement, I had neither seen nor spoken to Mrs. Brackett. I did everything to stop myself. I'd go out in the car and make it go the other way. I'd walk up to the telephone and all round it, but I never lifted the receiver. I spent my time thinking of new things to do. I mended the sign on the café. I even whitewashed one wall of the garage, though with every brush stroke, when I thought I had painted her out, she came up through the paint. But that evening after Mr. Rollick left, I had almost come to the end of everything that could prevent me trying to see her. I tried the usual little actions. I went round to the bakehouse to talk to the men. I came back and washed and shaved. I changed out of my working clothes. I put on my grey suit, but nothing happened; so I changed out of it into my brown. I came downstairs. There was only one thing left for me. I said to Mother, "Let's go into Wetherington, to the pictures."

"Get me my coat," Mother said. "I'm going out.

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"Don't gape at me," she said. "I suppose your mother can go out too, or are you the Fairy Prince?"

Mother's temper was the worst side of her; it is the same with me.

"Go on. Get out," she cried. "Go and chase your fancy woman. I'm not stopping you. I want to telephone."

Every family has its terrible sentences. Mother did not often answer the telephone, except in the shop; but when I was a child, if Mother announced she wanted to "use the telephone," she meant that everyone must get out of the house. Father used to say she would like the street cleared too.

I left her, but you see the situation I was in: there was nothing to stop me going up to see Mrs. Brackett. Nothing at all. I got out my car but I was too startled to know where to drive and, in fact, I just drove to the end of the town, then round it, and came back again to the crossroads near our house to see if the lights were on.

I drove out of the town again and then did the same journey once more because I couldn't remember *which* lights were on. The second time, they were all out.

All idea of going up to Mrs. Brackett's went. Mother's mysteriousness saved me. I found myself going south to Wetherington at last and I was glad. Mrs. Brackett's house was in exactly the opposite direction and every mile I put between her and myself made me gladder. It was one of those clear black evenings when the sky has been cleaned up by the wind and the stars have been brushed as bright as buttons, and if you had asked me after half an hour where I was going, I would have said I didn't know, I was just letting the car take me where it wanted.

Then I woke up. I had seen a signpost and I knew suddenly where I had been going all the time, where I had been thinking of going for a week or more without knowing it. I was going to see Noisy. I was only two miles from his house. I drove faster. All the feelings that had weighed me down for a couple of weeks fell off. Good old Noisy! Once I saw him, I would be all right. If there was one person who could save me from Mrs. Brackett, it was her ex-husband.

There is a stony lane up to Noisy's cottage. I had never been there in his time before, but I knew where it was. I had once sheltered there with Claudia in a storm, when it was a ruin. I remember she had been afraid there would be bats upstairs, but there weren't. This cottage was on Teddy Longfellow's estate and stood under a row of beeches that sighed all the time—very

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rare trees in our part of the country. The land around it used to be grazing land, but Teddy had changed all that. Noisy had been living there for the best part of a year, rebuilding the place on his own. He was good with his hands and very patient.

I drove up to the cottage. It lay back behind new high wooden palings with a wide gate. The first thing I saw gave me a start: it was Brewster's cab, and Teddy Longfellow's car beyond it. Beery Brewster was the taxi-driver in our town. I got out and went to open the gate. I couldn't open it. It was locked. I switched on my torch. I saw through a crack that there was a sort of lever and a bolt on it and, on the gatepost, a bell. A bell in the country! And then I saw there was a wire running from the other side of the gate to the upper window of the cottage. I pressed the bell. A light came on over the front door and then in the bedroom above, and the bedroom window opened and a greyhaired old woman with a shawl over her put her head out.

"Who is it?" she screeched in a nasal voice.

"Bob Fraser," I called out.

I kept the light of my torch on her face. It gave a sudden twitch to the left eye that I would have recognised anywhere.

"Put that light out," Noisy called out in his wartime voice. The wire squeaked, the gate opened. I went in, and Noisy was at the door with a wig in his hand and the shawl on his shoulders.

"Come in. We've quite a party in here. Welcome to the Doghouse. Old Brewster's dead drunk in the kitchen. Why didn't *you* bring your mother? She had a terrible drive."

Sitting by the fire in Noisy's little sitting-room, comfortable and happy, was Mother, with a glass of whisky in her hand.

"Oh, put that silly wig away," Mother laughed at him. "You frightened me out of my life. I hate those things. No!" screamed Mother. For Noisy had put the wig on.

"It keeps away the *undesirables*," Noisy said to me, underlining the word, giving a twitch to his face. "Request permission to land. Permission refused. The old lady—" he took the wig off and admired it—"is like a mother to me. I'll get you a drink."

I sat down next to Mother and she muttered, "What are you following me about for? Who looks a fool now?" and she nodded at the wig. "Argentine hostess—*you'd* believe anything."

And Mother laughed a little, united with herself and comfortable for the first time for weeks.

"Teddy Longfellow's here," she whispered to me, anxious to make her call on Noisy at this hour respectable. And she straightened her dress. "What have you come here for? Haven't I got a life?"

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Mother gave me a short, sharp rap on the knee to stop me replying, for Teddy Longfellow came in.

"Here, Teddy," said Noisy, handing him a drink.

"You haven't cut down those blasted f-f-fir trees yet, I see," said Teddy, fingering his beard at the end of his lower lip. He had a stammer which Noisy said was worth £10,000 a year to him, it doubled his consonants and his income.

Teddy Longfellow scared everyone in our neighbourhood and enjoyed doing it. With his beard and the twist he gave to his hair and his eyebrows, he looked like the devil. He used to alarm the parson by praising Hitler, and annoy the hunting people by calling foxhounds "those ruddy useless dogs." Teddy liked causing trouble: it was he who had started this tale about Noisy's Argentine girl and—it turned out—had given him the wig. And, of course he had been with Noisy when the pair of them broke into Heading and stole back that large glass case of stuffed birds, from under Mrs. Brackett's nose, and had pinched our van to do it. They were Noisy's property; he'd left them at Heading two years before at the time of the divorce, and Mrs. Brackett had refused to give them up. So he slipped in after dark while we were all at dinner there—that fatal night. As he sat there he eyed Mother and me to see if he could see any more chances of annoying us.

"I said," Teddy said, "when are you going to c-c-cut down those firs?"

"No can do," said Noisy, giving a twitch to his face. "Useful for emergency landings in poor visibility. When I get them in line I know I'm bang on the runway."

"You won't get off the ground when the bomb drops anyway," said Teddy.

"You don't think there will really be a bomb, do you, Mr. Longfellow?" Mother said anxiously to Teddy.

"Bob," said Noisy. "Come out here. I'll show you the place. I can't bear to see that swine falling for the woman I love."

And Noisy gave me a peculiar look. I have often thought of it since. I got up and went out of the room with him.

"Now," said Noisy. "Here's the passage. All my own work. I did every bit myself. I put on those two doors. These stairs were rotten. I had to replace half the treads. Come up. Oak, my boy, solid oak. Yes, I did all the painting. Made a bathroom. The geyser was falling to bits. I got a nice lad down at the airport to fix it for me. See? Hot. Cold. I did all the plumbing."

He turned on the taps. All the pipes in the house jumped, whistled, and thundered.

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"Beautiful sound, isn't it? Nothing like your own plumbing. Don't go away," he said. "Look at this. You sit in the bath, pull this ring—front gate closed, no one can get in. Pull this—open it. Front door, too. Wonderful what you can do if there are no women about. You see the idea?" he said. "'They' can't get at you. Radio silence."

He led the way downstairs.

"Follow me," he said. "You haven't seen all. I've got something rather special here. You'll appreciate it."

He led the way down the passage to a locked door. It had a small shuttered hole in the middle of it. He unlocked the door. Inside was a tiny room, no larger than a deep pantry. It contained an armchair as wide as the room, a shelf with a gramophone on it, a wireless, a book or two, a few tins of food, and a lot of tools neatly arranged on the walls.

"What are these?" I said.

"These? Wire-clippers. Very important."

There were indeed several wires running through carefully made holes in the walls. He pulled one or two wires.

"Puts on red light outside. Warns them off.

"Shuts up garage.

"Turns on bath.

"Opens shutter on door so you can see who's there. Press button: klaxon goes off in their face—no spies." Noisy stood back and made a statement. "You see the idea? Doghouse. Every house ought to have one. Make your own doghouse comfortable."

But I was looking at something else. There was hardly space for the two of us to stand in the little room, but against the wall was the lifesize figure of a young girl in uniform, cut out of cardboard, an air hostess from the Argentine, smiling at us. She was beckoning.

"Ah," said Noisy. "You've seen her! What a peach, Bob. What a smasher! Never says a word, just stands there day and night, always a welcome."

Noisy stopped and looked at me, in a way half threatening, for he stuck out his thin chest.

"Don't go near her," he said. "Or I'll kill you."

And then slowly a dry grin came to one side of his mouth.

"If you're ever in trouble—you know what I mean, the only trouble there is," he said. "Here you are. Just pop along to the doghouse. I mean it. I trust you. Come along. I mean if the Fairy Queen gets on your tail, starts throwing the television about, or burning your clothes on the sitting-room fire, or trying to get your medals into slot machines . . . I say, just let the air

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out of her tyres and buzz off down here. It's all yours. I've packed in all that sort of thing now. There's my girl now," he said, pointing to the cardboard figure. " I've given her the key to my heart." And, sure enough, Noisy had hung that rusty old door key on a nail at the back of the model. " And, by the way, that reminds me. Testing, testing, testing, zero, one, two, three, four—she rang up to see if you were here an hour ago."

" Who? " I said.

" My ex-wife," said Noisy, giving me the pistol shot with his eye.

He stared at me as if waiting for me to fall. Then he laughed.

" It's all right. I told her you weren't here. And, that's funny, you weren't. Be a good fellow, for God's sake, ring her up or something. I don't want her blinding down here in the middle of the night looking for you. Go *now*," he said. " You know what women are. I had to put up the barricades when my first wife dropped down here six months ago. She'd heard I was nesting. She brought two kids with her. I don't know where she got them. Now let's see what that swine Teddy is up to."

We went into the sitting-room just as Mother was saying, " If you could only tell the future, I mean, Mr. Longfellow, you would know what was going to happen . . ."

She glared at me when I came into the room. She was on to her old subject and Teddy was politely nodding.

" Bob's got to go off," said Noisy, but I sat down. I didn't leave at once, and when I did I took Mother with me. She was upset.

" I could wring that Noisy's neck. I could limb him, playing a trick like that," she said, " spreading all that daft stuff with a wig. No woman would go and live at a place like that. What were you doing outside? "

" Looking for the air hostess," I said.

" That's all that pansy stuff. What's clever in it? " Mother said. So I said nothing, for now she was with me she was fighting herself again.

Something must have happened to me at Noisy's. I don't know what—but the next evening I went up to Mrs. Brackett's. I didn't even ring her first. I just went.

It was always quiet up at Heading. Through the trees by the house you could see the stars, and the grey stone was lit by them. There was a smell of cows and wood smoke, and there was a touch of frost in the air. I passed the maid going home on her bicycle as I was going up. The curtains were not drawn, and I

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could see two lamps burning in the long sitting-room. The front door was open and after I had rung the bell I walked in the wide hall where Noisy's case of birds had stood—the marks of the stand were still on the carpet—and I called out, "Anyone at home?"

All the white doors in the hall were closed except one leading to the drawing-room. I listened. Then I heard talking: Mrs. Brackett was speaking on the telephone.

I went farther in and I heard her say, "There's someone here," but she still went on talking. More I couldn't catch until two or three words made me stop. She was saying the name of that horse again: "Tray—or something or other—Pays On." Exactly the words she had said two years or more ago, the third time I came up to ask her to pay our bill and when she made all the trouble about it and I was afraid of her. I wasn't afraid of her now and I wasn't afraid of the house and all its things. The three or four big pictures in the room even looked smaller and the chairs rather shabby.

I heard her ring off, and she came out fast from the room. When she saw me, the telephone laugh went dead on her face. She hesitated and then said, with a quick, short shake of her head which she always gave when she was telling a lie or cheating, "Hullo! That was Alice Fobham."

Then she shook her head again and said, "Actually it wasn't."

Does that make two lies? I don't know. The moment she boldly said them, she lowered her head and put out a foot as if she were sketching something in a hurry on the carpet, and then took a few steps aside before she looked at me again. She had a real liar's walk. It was her body that told the lies—I mean the way she walked, how her hips moved and her arms; her tongue, I must say, usually told the truth. If it didn't, her head gave a shake to warn you she was going to try something on. That was why people who spread stories about her really liked her. And when I say her body told lies, I mean they were the kind of lies any man likes to hear.

"They told me you telephoned," I said.

"Why didn't you ring me back?" she said.

"I've come instead," I said.

"You don't say! Well, sit down. I've been washing my hair," she said. She pointed to the deep, green settee where we had sat the night we had gone chasing Noisy and his birds. It was too low for me; I'm tall.

Mrs. Brackett looked plain. There was a line across her forehead and her hair was darker because it was wet. It ended in rat-tails, just like the hair of a maid we used to have years ago.

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She went to the far side of the fireplace and held her hair down to dry it by the fire. We both spoke at once.

She said, in her cattle dealer's voice, "I wanted to see you. I expect you think it was my fault Claudia broke up with you. I'm sorry."

I said, "What is this 'Pays On'? 'Tray Pays On.' You said it on the telephone."

"Pays on?" she said, throwing her hair back and looking at me. "What d'you mean? On the blower—I said that?"

"I don't know," I said. "You said it once before, when I came up here years ago about the bill."

She smiled.

"Still on about the bill," she said. "What's the matter? Haven't you paid your water rates? I don't know what you're talking about. Pays on? Never heard of it," and she lowered her head to the fire.

"I'll never get this dry," she said.

"That's it. Pays On," I said. "Is it a horse? Noisy said it was a horse."

She sat up and threw her hair back from her broad low forehead when she heard Noisy's name.

"When I came up here. Noisy said it sounded like one of those French horses."

"A French horse? I never heard—" she stopped. She opened her mouth and put her tongue in her cheek, like a child caught stealing. She got up and walked over to a side table where the drinks stood. I watched the way she walked. She was wearing a terrible dress of blue stuff with little yellow and red daisies on it. It looked like someone else's. And a tomato-coloured cardigan. I remember her saying, the night when Claudia and I had dinner there, that it puts a woman "one up in the conver" if she gives a man a shock at the sight of her clothes and it makes the other women look sick.

"A horse," she laughed. "What will you have to drink?" she said, turning round. "Noisy told you that?"

"Yes."

"Well," she said. "I will tell you."

And she spoke like someone spelling out to a child.

"It's not a horse. It's a man. A Frenchman who lives in the country. It's French."

"Nothing for me," I said. "Why talk in French? Is it smart or something?"

"You're a suspicious character, Bob. You sound sore," she said. "What's the matter? Has flour gone up? Can't you sell your cream puffs?"

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I kept my temper because her voice had changed and was soft.

"Let's see," I said. "He's a man. And he's French. And he lives in the country. He wouldn't be a peasant, would he?"

"Good," she laughed. "That's it—a French peasant. A real peasant."

I nodded.

"'Bloody peasant,' Noisy said," I said, giving a scratch behind my ear.

She gave me a long look which died away and she said outright, "All right. You win. I was talking about you."

"That's funny," I said. "Noisy thought it was a horse."

"Noisy has better manners than me. Can we drop it?"

"What?" I said. "Is it something insulting? I didn't know that. What's wrong with it? It's no worse than silly bitch, is it?"

I thought Mrs. Brackett was going to fly at me, but she didn't. She stuck her chin out. She said quietly, seriously, "I apologise."

"That's all right," I said. "It's best to begin with a row."

"Damn. Damn. Damn," she said. "I really do apologise. Honour bright. You're like your father," she said. And then her eye gave that little flick. "Begin what?" she said.

I got up to walk over to the table to her.

"No," she said. "Stay where you are. If you don't want a drink, I do." I sat down again, but when she brought her drink she came over to my side of the fireplace and sat on the stool there. We were silent for quite a time.

"I've bought the Mill House," I said.

"That's nice of you," she said. "You've changed the subject. How did you hear about it?"

She was sharp where there was a question of a deal. I told her about it. I said I thought of turning it into an hotel, and we argued about that a long time—how you'd never get a manager in a place like that.

"How much did you give for it?" she said.

I didn't answer, but I said—it just came into my head and I didn't mean it, "How would *you* like to manage it?"

She was as surprised as I was.

"I don't like being mocked," she said. "Is that what you came up to say? Of course I wouldn't manage your hotel. Anyway, it's a crime to do anything like that with that place. D'you always go about sitting in cars with women and ask them to manage hotels? Did you ask Claudia? Why are you so mad about money?"

Jealous! I pricked up my ears. The room seemed to smile at

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me. There was a picture on one of the walls of a lot of cardinals drinking wine, and the central one had his smiling face turned towards us. Even the white door at the end of the room might have opened. I wouldn't have been surprised.

"A girl of nineteen," I said. "Since father died I am responsible."

"Pooh. You're only twenty-two yourself."

"Thirty," I said.

"How old d'you think I am?" she said, putting her head back and moving to the sofa. In a way, she looked her worst, but I wasn't looking at her face. I remember Noisy once saying he was 2,300 years old and that she was twelve.

"Twelve," I said.

"I'm thirty-three," she said, giving the short shake to her head. "Actually, thirty-six. And don't copy Noisy."

Thirty-six, I was thinking, that will be something to tell Mother the next time she starts on me. When I looked at her again she looked very friendly.

"I'm selling this house—if you're in the buying mood," she said. "I can't afford it."

I shook my head.

"Why don't you sell it to Teddy Longfellow?" I said. "I saw him at Noisy's last night. He's rich."

She started.

"The liar!" she said, blushing. "Noisy said you weren't there."

"I wasn't when you rang," I said.

She smiled and leaned towards me.

"Did you see this girl of his, the Argentine girl everyone is talking about?" she said.

I was the biggest fool in the world, I felt so confident of her.

"Yes," I said carelessly, and I laughed.

"What is she like—young? I'm glad he's got a girl," she said.

I was in it: I had to go on.

"Yes, young," I said.

"Is she tall?" Mrs. Brackett moved nearer to me. "Tell me what she's like."

"Dark," I said. "Yes, tall."

"Taller than me? Pretty? What is she like? What did she say?"

She started arranging her hair as she talked.

"Taller," I said. "A bit—kind of stiff. I've only seen her in uniform. She didn't say much. No, I don't think she said anything. Teddy Longfellow was there, and Mother. Something dead about her."

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" Is she working? I mean is she air hostessing still? "

I was beginning to enjoy this.

" I think they've grounded her."

" Why? " Mrs. Brackett said anxiously.

" I don't know," I said.

" You must have some reason," she said.

" She just looked grounded," I said.

" How can anyone look grounded? She sounds like a dummy to me," said Mrs. Brackett, with an unnatural laugh. " Stiff as a board, in uniform. Doesn't she speak? Poor Noisy—serves him right. He likes a chat."

She put her hand on my arm and said, excitedly, " I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's go and see them. I'll ring him up."

I saw my mistake.

" No," I said, alarmed by what I'd said.

" Yes," she said, moving away, but I caught her arm and held her.

" My hair is wet," she said, shaking to get away, but I held her arm and presently she stopped pulling.

" Please," she said. " You're hurting me." I slackened my hold and she got up at once. She was a trickster.

" I'm going to see them," she said, looking at her watch and going towards the door.

" It's ten o'clock," I said. " They'll be in bed."

Mrs. Brackett stopped at the door. She went very white. With her hair plastered down and her mouth suddenly small and her eyes startled as if I had hit her, she looked ugly.

" That," she said, coming back a step to me, " was a dirty remark."

" Tray Pays On," I said.

She looked as if she would throw something, if there had been anything near. Then her eyes almost closed and she laughed and laughed and came and sat down near me.

" You're not the same as when you first came up here. What has happened to you? " she said softly to me.

" Nor are you," I said, moving towards her.

She began pulling at the thread of the settee as she had done before. I can't remember what we said—but we did get on to the subject of the door at the end of the room and where it led to. To the second staircase, she said. And one thing led to another.

The next morning when I had seen to the vans, I rang her. I was mad to hear her voice. There was no reply. Several times I rang and there was no answer. Mother came into the room behind the shop to look at me, and every time the phone rang

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she and I moved to it. At last I had to go to Wetherington in the afternoon—it was early closing with us and Mother wanted to come with me and go shopping. There was something secretive about Mother because she wouldn't, as she usually did, tell me where to pick her up in the town. Usually I found her outside the biggest draper's, but this time she wouldn't say for a long time, and then said, " In the station yard." This puzzled me. When Mother is secretive she has what we used to call her broody look, like a hen sitting heavily, and occasionally she'd break out into the first line of a song, but stop because she could never remember the others.

In the end I met her at the station, looking comfortable and sly, as though she had eaten something good, and when we drove away she was soft-tempered and dreamy. She had got her week of anger off her mind. We had been driving for twenty minutes when she said, " They don't tell you anything. It's daft. Your Uncle Dan has been dead for years."

She had been to a fortune-teller.

" Well, who else could it be? " she said.

We got back to the shop and I drove into the yard at the side and straight for the garage, which I had left open. It was dark now and I had put the headlights full on. Just as the car was going into the garage, Mother clutched my arm and cried out, " Stop! Bob! There's a woman there."

She was right. There, standing against the whitewashed wall stood a tall young girl, smiling. For a moment I thought it was Molly Gibson; she was dark. Then I looked again. It was not a girl, not a living girl. It was Noisy's cardboard girl from the Argentine.

" Oh, it gave me a turn, I thought you'd kill her," Mother said. " What is it? Who put it there? "

We got out. Mother looked at me suspiciously. It was what the fortune-teller had said, she said: there'd be a visitor from overseas.

I examined the figure.

" It's Noisy's," I said. " It's got the key to his heart hanging on the back."

Mother came and looked. Her face darkened.

" You've upset Noisy. You don't listen to me. You've upset him. I could see it the other night."

And Mother marched out of the yard, down the street to our house.

I knew Noisy was always playing the fool, but there was always something behind his jokes. And then—it was natural—I felt a bit uneasy about Noisy since I had fallen in love with Mrs.

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Brackett; he was friendly, but he had changed; but I had once or twice caught him giving me a strange look, his face not twitching, but still as stone, his eyes very sharp, sarcastic—no worse than that, but cool.

I went to the bakehouse but the men didn't know anything about the dummy. I went along to the café and asked the two girls there. Had Noisy been in, I asked the first girl.

"No," she said.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

The other girl came out of the kitchen.

"Has Noisy been in today? Any time?"

"No," said the girls.

I told them there was a poster in the garage.

"Oh," said the eager girl from the kitchen. "That was Mrs. Brackett. She left it this afternoon."

And she gave me a knowing smile. I did not like it; the other, who used to talk a lot to Claudia, gave me a selfrighteous look.

"Did she leave a message?" I said, not letting on. "You're sure it was Mrs. Brackett?"

"Yes," they said. "And there was no message."

They were grinning behind my back when I left. I saw them in the mirror. You can imagine what was going on in my head. I didn't mind the joke—but—Mrs. Brackett and Noisy in it together!

I went along to our house.

"Mrs. Brackett brought it," I said.

Mother ignored this. Her temper was rising.

"Trying to make a laughing-stock of your mother!" she said. "Telling me he had an Argentine girl up there! Pretending it was his wig. Do you think anyone in his senses would believe a twopenny tale like that?"

"I didn't make it up," I said.

"I'm sure you didn't," she said. "You haven't the brains. All this love has made you stupid; going about with your mouth wide open, you'd swallow anything and the business goes to ruin. Two customers complained the bread was burnt yesterday—the whole lot. The whole town's laughing at you. Noisy's taken your measurements, my boy—running after another man's wife. They've made fools of you. And I am glad. It will teach you a lesson. And don't ask me to be sorry. I told you this divorcing was all my eye. Oh, I wish your father was alive."

"Why would they put it there?" I said. "Anyway, it was Mrs. Brackett."

I was going to say more; I was in a temper too. I went round

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to the shop again and I sat at the desk staring at the telephone, and then I rang Mrs. Brackett.

"I have been trying to ring you," I said.

"That is a change," she said. "Is anything the matter?" Her voice sounded cold.

I laughed. It was so lovely to hear her.

"Well," I said. And I laughed again.

"What is the joke?" she said.

I was still laughing as I began, "I—"

"Are you ringing me up about that dummy?" she said sharply. "You are? You found it? Bad luck for you. Listen—I don't like being mocked. I had ten years of that kind of thing with Noisy."

God, I thought, Mother storming at me at home and Mrs. Brackett shouting from up on the hill.

"I don't want any more stableboy jokes." Mrs. Brackett had a temper. We all had tempers, I suppose; Mother, me, Mrs. Brackett, and all of us.

She slammed down the telephone.

I would have let her temper go and waited for her to cool off and to come running down. What stopped me was not my own temper but what was clearer every moment I thought of it: that she and Noisy had got together again, for how else could she have got hold of the dummy?

I ran out into the yard and that damn silly thing was still smiling away at me as I got into the car. I drove up to Heading. I was mad. The servant was coming down on her bicycle, just as I had seen her two days before, and I could have knocked her over.

But Mrs. Brackett was not at Heading. She had gone out. I came slowly back to the shop. I did not know what to do. Several times my hand went to the telephone. I was tempted to ring Noisy to tell him what I thought of him, but I couldn't. So I gave up and went to the Crown.

News, as I say, travels fast in our part of the country and when I came in I thought the landlord and one or two others were eyeing me in a funny way—there was a quiet laugh going on. At last, the landlord, who was polishing glasses and putting them on the shelf, holds a glass up to his eye and says, "I hear there's been a burglary at Noisy Brackett's."

"Did they get away with much?"

"I don't know. The gardener at Holmes told Jim. Did you hear anything, Mr. Fraser?"

"I was up there this afternoon," I said. "Not at the house,

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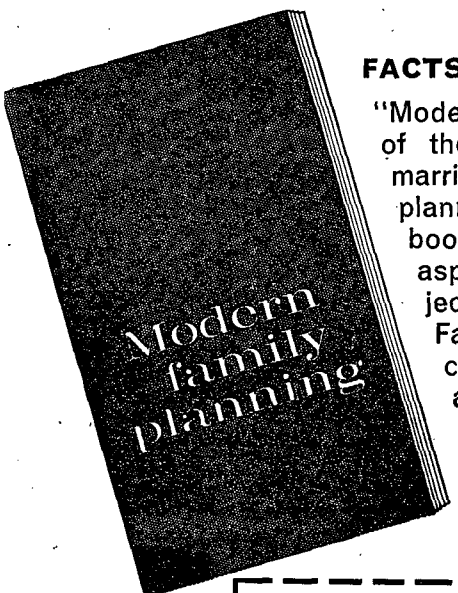

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but I came back on the lower road from Wetherington. I didn't hear anything."

"You passed us coming back," said Mr. Pinkney.

And the landlord winked at him.

That was enough for me. I went back to the shop and rang up Noisy.

"Bob," said Noisy. "You rotten freelance, breaking up a happy home; think of all those poor children crying, 'Where's Mummy? When's she coming back from the Argentine?' Tragedy of easy divorce, divided home, one more little delinquent attacking women in parks. Father's sad evidence—"

"Listen, Noisy—"

"Bob, you bloody daylight burglar—over."

"I've got her," I said. "She put her in our garage."

"Who did?"

"Your wife."

"My ex-wife, if you please," said Noisy.

"We found her when we got back from Wetherington this afternoon."

"Who's we?" said Noisy.

"Mother and I," I said.

"Mother in it, too," said Noisy. "My God! Radio silence, old boy. Operation Doghouse. I'll be over in five minutes."

He came with his usual roar.

"Let me see her," he said, and we went into the garage. He sniffed the air. "It's damp in here. Bad for the poor girl's chest," he said.

"Isn't she a peach?" he said. "Now, my sweetie," he said. "You stay where you are, do as you are told. It will be all right. We're going to lock you in, so you don't get up to tricks."

And he closed the garage door.

"Aren't you going to take her back?" I said, as he locked the door himself.

"Bob," he said very seriously, "when Teddy Longfellow and I broke into Heading and got my birds, they were my birds, weren't they? We didn't steal anything, did we? We didn't touch a thing that wasn't our own—right? We didn't do any damage, did we? We didn't break a kitchen window and leave filthy footmarks on the floor, did we? One of the cleanest jobs you ever saw, I bet, wasn't it? And we didn't lift anything lying about like a pair of Service wire-clippers, for example. Oh yes," he said, scowling. "We're going to get them back. Jump in. I know her hideouts. We'll buzz up to Heading to see if they're there, but if they're not they'll be in her car. And remember, Bob, for future reference," he said, giving that twitch to his

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eye as he turned his head to me, "when the Fairy Queen takes off she's never got more than a gallon of gas in the tank. That cuts the target area down to eleven miles. She can't be at the Fobhams', for instance."

We were off, and let me say one thing before I forget it: the roar of Noisy's car was unmistakable in our town and, of course, it brought Mother to the door.

We tried Heading first—"the ancestral home," Noisy said—and drew nothing, then to the Duck outside Tolton, the Lamb at Forth Hill, the Aylesbury Arms, the Green Man, and the Sailor's Return.

"Bob," said Noisy, getting white in the face after every pub, "the Fairy Queen is not one of those who, in the normal free-for-all, can dish it out but can't take it. Something must have got her on the raw."

I had told him the story—well, three-quarters of it.

"Tall dark girl, you said. Didn't talk much, you said?" he said. "Very nice," he said, grinning. "Anything else?"

"I said I thought she was grounded," I said.

Noisy laughed loudly.

"Wrong there, Bob," he said. "She's in uniform."

He became thoughtful.

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"Of course, I can see she was getting her own back on me, but why dump that lovely creature at *your* place? That's what foxes me." We drove on, missing the pub at Denton Bridge because the man there watered the gin.

"There's only one more chance," Noisy said, driving now on the wrong side of the road. "Play the game or get out of the bed," he shouted at a passing car. We seemed to lose our way in by-lanes. Suddenly he pulled up at a pub called the Red Lion and stopped in the yard. We did not get out.

"The only thing I can think of, Bob, is—you were making a pass at her. Yes, that's what it must have been. Never make a joke when you're making a pass at a woman. They don't like it. You're right down the drain if you do. And let me tell you, I don't care a damn if you are down the drain. But I want my wire-clippers back. They've been with me in France, in Egypt, in India, and I've never seen the man who'd dare lay a finger on them."

We looked round the yard.

"What did I tell you?" said Noisy. "See that? She's here."

He pointed to Mrs. Brackett's car. We sat gazing with unbelief.

"Keep your eyes skinned, Bob," said Noisy at last, and he went over to her car, opened the door and looked around inside. He came back with a heavy pair of Service wire-clippers in his hand.

"Mission accomplished," he said. "Let's get drunker."

We considered the peaceful white walls of the inn, the bare trees, the lights shining behind the curtained windows.

"It brings back memories," said Noisy. "Many's the time we've finished up here, the Fairy Queen and I, after a row. Funny to think she's in there now, all on her own, knocking them back. Mind if I come in, too, for old times' sake?"

For I had begun to move for the door.

There was a loud noise coming from the bar-where the locals were, but we went into the small one. Sitting in a chair alone by the bar was Mrs. Brackett.

"Scotland Yard," said Noisy thickly, turning back the lapel of his coat.

Mrs. Brackett put her drink down and, looking at Noisy, she blushed.

"I see you've brought the sergeant," she said, glancing coldly at me.

"We didn't know whether this was going to be a strong-arm job, did we, Bob?" said Noisy. "It's all right. We're both drunk."

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"Mr. Fraser's quite free with his arms, too," said Mrs. Brackett primly. "Why doesn't he sit down? Is he going?" For Noisy had sat down beside her.

"I'm mad about her, aren't you, Bob?" said Noisy. "A real bit of old Newgate, isn't she? No, Bob's not going."

"Well, why doesn't he join in the conversation?" said Mrs. Brackett. "Has flour gone up again? Or is he worried about his new girl?"

"Oh," cried Noisy, "has Bob got a new girl? He didn't tell me that. Bob, what's this, you rotten seducer? You never told me."

"A foreign girl, Argentine, I believe," said Mrs. Brackett. "Very dark, very tall—they'll make a handsome pair. She used to be an air hostess; isn't that so, Mr. Fraser? Grounded—"

"Much better grounded," said Noisy. "You know where they are."

"A bit stiff in her uniform," said Mrs. Brackett.

"That will wear off when they get married," said Noisy.

I laughed, but Noisy didn't, and neither did Mrs. Brackett when she looked at me.

"With a fine fellow like Bob, of course it will," said Noisy. "Good looking too."

"Yes," said Mrs. Brackett. "And doing well. He's just bought the Mill House. He asked me to manage it. It's going to be an hotel."

"Go on!" said Noisy. "What? Eight ten a week and all found?"

"You won't know him in ten years' time. He'll have bought the town," said Mrs. Brackett.

"Well, all I can say," said Noisy, "I hope he's found the right woman."

"She sounds absolutely cut out for him," said Mrs. Brackett. "Has she got any money, Mr. Fraser?"

"*Mr.* Fraser, *Mr.* Fraser," said Noisy in a shocked way. "You don't seem to know each other too well. Come and sit over here, Bob, and get acquainted. This is Mrs. Brackett. Will you excuse me a minute?"

And Noisy went out.

"I love you," I said to Mrs. Brackett. "Let us go. Now."

Mrs. Brackett's face softened.

"I've been in love with you since I first saw you," I said.

"I was mad about *you* actually," said Mrs. Brackett. "But—giving a shake to her head—"I don't like technique."

"It was just a joke."

"Really?" said Mrs. Brackett. "Well, I haven't got a sense of humour. Ask Noisy."

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"But last night you loved me," I said.

"Hold it a minute," she said. "I'll tell you."

She got up and went to the street door.

"Noisy's a long time. Has he gone? I didn't hear him."

But Noisy came in and met her there.

"I thought you'd gone," said Mrs. Brackett.

"No, my sweet, just taking the air," said Noisy, taking her arm. "Don't tell me you missed me."

Mrs. Brackett hesitated.

"I'm going home," she said suddenly, and pushed violently past him out of the pub.

We stared at the closed door. And at once the closed door in the sitting-room at Heading came into my mind. I don't know what was in Noisy's mind, but we both went after her. And at once we heard a shout from her across the yard.

"Bloody funny," she shouted, and came marching in a fury across the yard, opened the door of Noisy's car, and got in and slammed it. Noisy sauntered up to her.

"You damn well drive me," she shouted at him.

Noisy turned to me, shrugged, and beckoned to me, but I was staring at her car. Someone had let the air out of the two back tyres. Suddenly I heard Noisy's car roar. He had taken off.

Mrs. Brackett's car stood in our garage at home for three weeks. It took me twenty minutes to pump up its tyres, and where she and Noisy went that night I do not know. I went after them. They weren't at Heading. They weren't at his cottage. Nor in the days, even the weeks, that followed. The damp got into the air hostess from the Argentine. She peeled and she buckled and fell over. I told one of the men to pitch her in the dustbin. He brought the key hanging on the back to me, and I told him to throw that away too. On second thoughts, I broke up the dummy girl myself.

Mother said nothing, but once or twice she went on about the Future—the usual thing.

"If you knew what it was going to be, you'd act differently," she says. "People ought to tell you, then you'd know," she says. And then she gets on to Teddy Longfellow saying there isn't any future, and I tell her I agree with him. A few weeks ago, Heading came up for sale. Mother says the class of trade is changing in our town.

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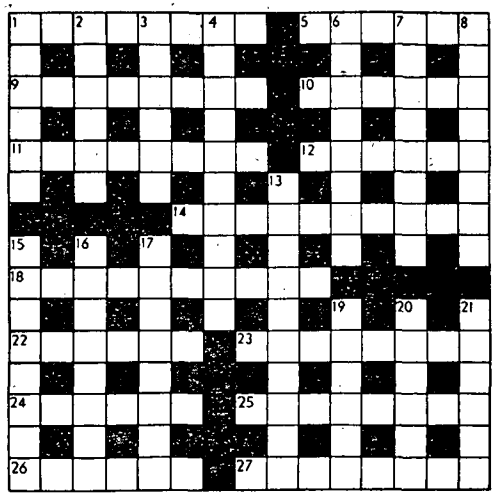
Solution on page 109



ACROSS

1 Sawbones' opening gambit (8).

5 In brief, ready made (6).

9 Artist's work looks wet ! (8).

10 Gap NNE off Malaya (6).

11 Tired of being on an even keel ! (8).

12 Lifeless play, as it were (6).

14 I toast rice and toss it—with wicked results (10).

18 Bury direction in shell—got in the way (10).

22 Toy with a cherry-stone! (6).

23 Tell friend (8).

24 Havana turns after tee—very sad (6).

25 Like snow at Christmas (8).

26 Metal blend of pitchblende (6).

27 In difficulties (8).

DOWN

1 Slight, at the very least (6).

2 Part of contract sounds like tears (6).

3 Mafia-land (6).

4 Election can change it into 13 (10).

6 Subject for would-be orator (8).

7 H.M.S. Bunting ? (4-4).

8 He lives a double double life (8).

13 See 4 (10).

15 He demands more than shorthand (8).

16 High, no doubt, aboard 7 (8).

17 Christian prayer mat, so to speak (4-4).

19 " Englishmen detest a ——" (Noel Coward) (6).

20 Sounds as if the musicians have been silenced ! (6).

21 Rocked and rolled—in Scotland ? (6).

Printed in England by PERCY BROTHERS LTD., THE HOTSPUR PRESS, MANCHESTER, 1, and published on the tenth of each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. Registered for Transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription Rates: Inland, £1 19s. for 12 months, 19s. 6d. for 6 months. Overseas (except Canada), £1 17s. for 12 months, 18s. 6d. for 6 months. Canada, £1 14s. 6d. for 12 months, 17s. 3d. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. KINGSTONS LTD. ARGOSY is sold subject to the following conditions, namely, that it shall not, without the written consent of the publishers first given, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of by way of Trade except at the full retail price as shown on the cover; and that it shall not be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise disposed of in a mutilated condition or in any unauthorised cover by way of Trade; or affixed to or as part of any publication or advertising, literary or pictorial matter whatsoever.

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